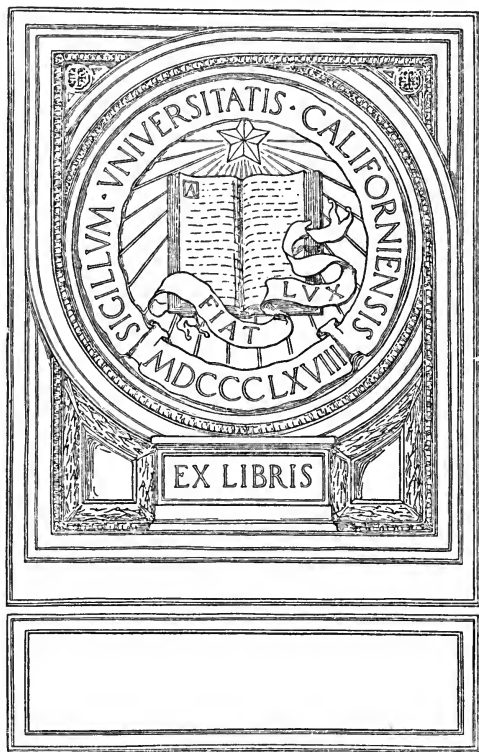
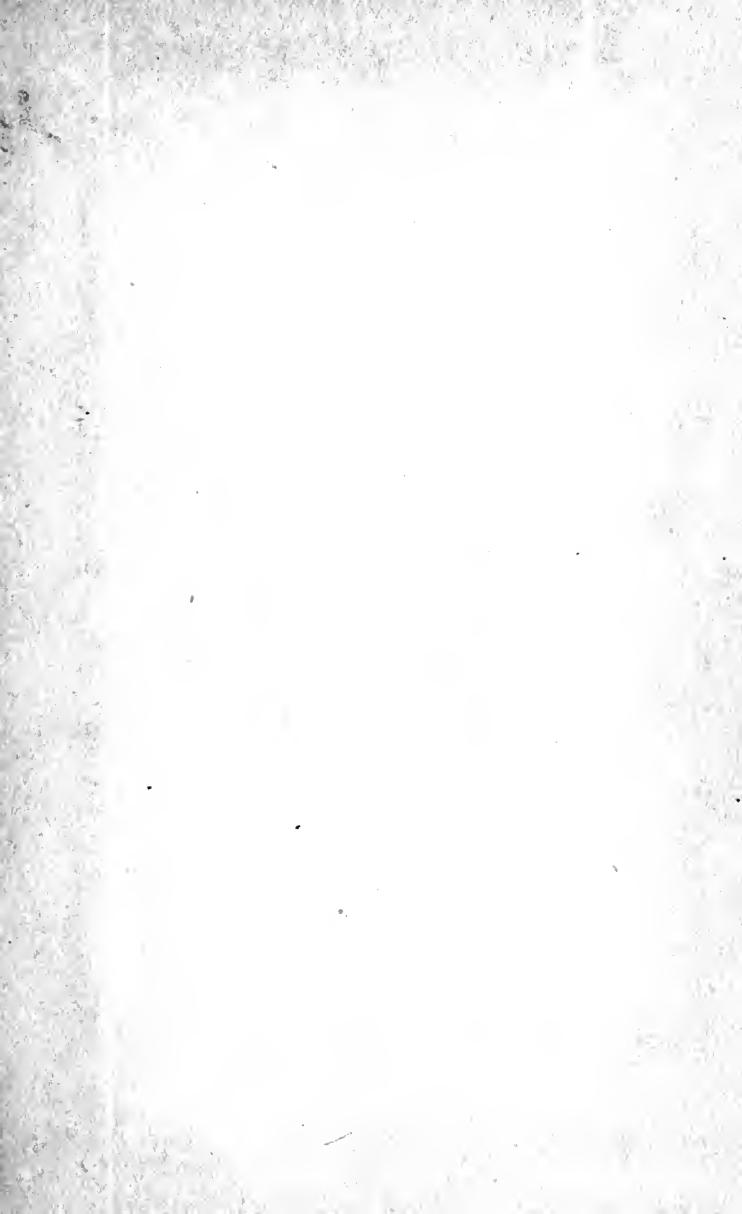
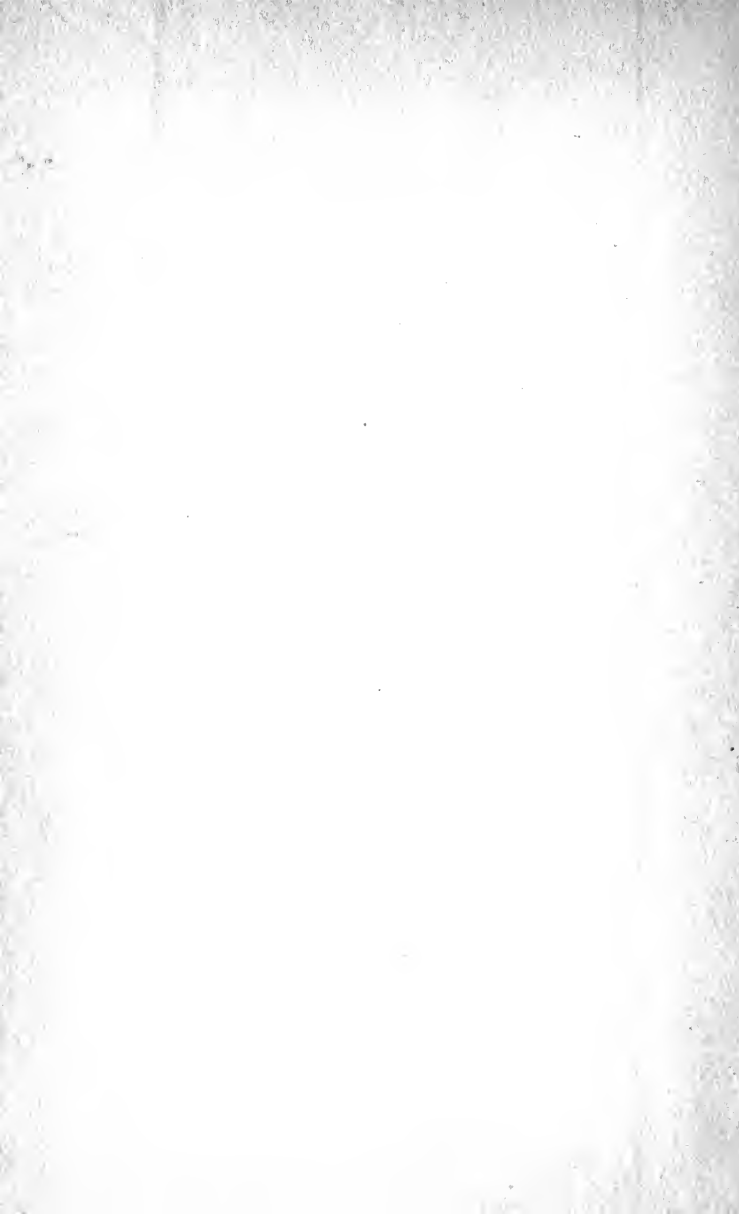


Horae
Solitariae

By
Edward
Thomas

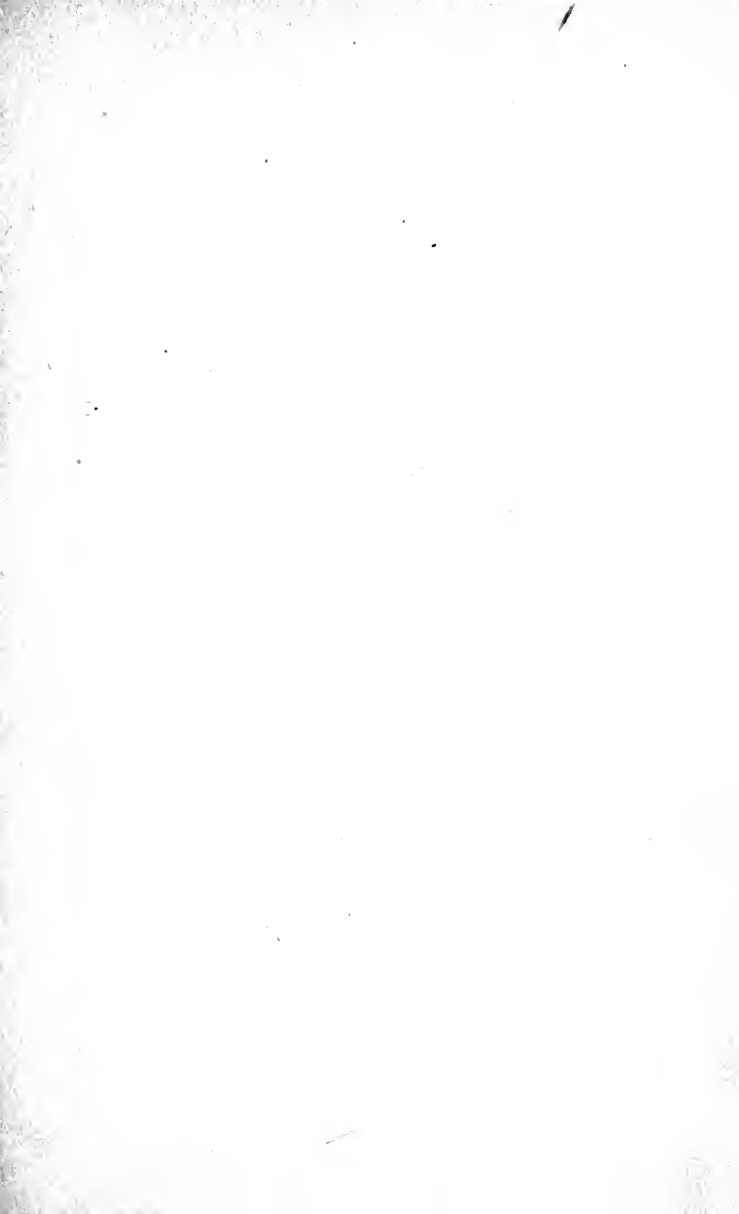








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Horae Solitariae

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Horae Solitariae

By

Edward Thomas

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The first, and the last two, of these papers have not been printed before. For permission to reprint the rest, I thank the Editors of *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Crampton's Magazine*, *The Speaker*, *Country Life*, *The Illustrated London News*, and *The Review of the Week*.

I

Horæ Solitariae*

AMONGST a thousand books, I find hardly one title so opulent as *Horæ Solitariae*. It has for the inward ear a melody that sings apart. It is outside even the class in which the title gives a full rhyme with the contents, rich as they may be. Many first editions are of this class ; but as the issues grow numerous, they become merely part of somebody's "works," and *The Winter's Tale*, or *Steps to the Temple*, or *The Mistress of Philaret*, becomes volume 1 or 2. Titles like *Elia* are of a subtler beauty, depending on the contents, which they first show darkly, and afterwards mysteriously expound. Some

* "*Horæ Solitariae*," printed by J. W. Pasham, Black-Friars ; and sold by Edward and Charles Dilly, in the Poultry ; and by James Mathews, in the Strand. 1776.

Horæ Solitariae

books never have titles, except strictly speaking, and scarcely after scores of editions does *Johnson's Dictionary* hint at the autobiographer who chose so rare a pathway. Thoreau thought that nicknames were the only real names. A large and uninteresting family that proves this has some excuse ; the writer has less, whose titles should be as veracious as nicknames, so that they shall in time be eloquent of the verse and the poet himself,

“Celui qui la chanson a faicte
A l'umbre d'une coppeau de May.”

But *Horæ Solitariae*—is it not a title under which many might expect a record of their daintiest pleasures ? To me, at least, at one time it seemed an apt title for the book of life.

I have been told that the book is very dull. The other day a notoriously honest man told me it was theological. Yet, though I am by nature credulous, I smiled, and on

Horæ Solitariae

my shelf it has a place of honour. For a book it is still young, just casting aside its outer fopperies, and with an aspect of consequence decayed, and dignified by decay. It has the air of a wit and gentleman of Goldsmith's day, in a benjamin with faded gold brocade. The title is his button-hole or his philosophy in brief. To me it is as matins and vespers ; "in its smile and by its side" I rise and set, read my books, write my letters, and of an afternoon (when callers are few, and frivolously engaged) create buttered toast—according to *Horæ Solitariae* I regulate the amount of butter on it and within. As a rule its influence is on the side of quietness and well buttered toast. Only once have I known its golden tones a little quickened by exquisite rage. That was when it poured a scornful negative upon the words of Chesterfield concerning "waste of time." Writing to young Stanhope in 1746, "I hope," says the noble earl,

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“I hope you employ your whole time, which few people do ; and that you put every moment to profit of some kind or other. I call company, walking, riding, etc., employing one’s time, and, upon proper occasions, very usefully ; but what I cannot forgive in anybody is sauntering, and doing nothing at all, with a thing so precious as time, and so irrecoverable when lost.”

Horæ Solitariae first heard those sentences in Oxford. I remember well. Breakfast was almost at an end, and the first cigarette had just been lit ; which is as much as to say it was one of the sweetest moments of life. For, pleasant though the perfume of tobacco may be at all times, it is incomparable, blown from a neighbour, when the window on a summer morning has been opened wide, and coffee has given way to oranges, and as yet your own lips are “ virgin from ” the herb. The smoke had flown out and returned with a burden from the roses in the window ; and one had turned over the pages of Chesterfield. He read aloud that passage with a laugh (in the cushions

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of his chair one could not be ingulfed in less than half an hour), allowing to the first part of the second sentence a little humour, but of the most timid kind. We were very young, and a voice (it seemed the voice of *Horæ Solitariae*) floated across the table, like "the pipe of half awakened birds," saying blissfully, "The art of life is not too wisely to waste time." Years have spoiled the young laugh that made this so adequate. Still, however, the old volume looks down from the shelf with a tired smile, blessing the listlessness which a midnight lamp cannot rouse, and calling up the summer moods, that gently mocked the quiet sorrows of a hundred centuries and the organ tones of woe that was passing.

"Temporis O suaves lapsus ! O otia sana !

O herbis dignæ numerari, et floribus horæ."

In those summers we had nothing to do, but I think it was often divinely done. We had nothing to say, and we said it wonderfully.

Horæ Solitariae

But, indeed, if we are to take Lord Chesterfield seriously, did any man whose time was "too valuable to be wasted" ever do nothing at all? The brain, far less the something that sits ghostly at the helm, is not like a machine that pauses on every Sunday, though it may rest. True sauntering is such as we may suppose to have been the solace of the supreme Being on the seventh day, when having rested from all His work and seen that it was very good, He would not have disdained to walk among the four waters of Eden and to see again the gold, bdellium and the onyx stone. In sauntering the sad are cherished by recollections of past joy and past sorrow, without a stain; then first the joyful verily behold their bliss; for the poet, the saint, the man of the world, it pours out ambrosia and precious oil. It is the altar of reverie. Victor Hugo has called reverie a poison of the brain, but he forgot that reverie is the substitute of meditation in the minds of children, *i.e.* of

Horæ Solitariae

three quarters of the adult population of the world. But the rightful fountain of justice on this point is the most eminent saunterer.

“I have met,” says Henry Thoreau, “with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of walking, that is of taking walks—who had a genius, so to speak, for *sauntering* : which word is beautifully derived ‘from idle people who roved about the country in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going *à la Sainte Terre*,’ to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, ‘There goes a *Sainte-Terrer*, a Saunterer—a Holy Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds ; but they who do go there are saunterers in the good sense, such as I mean. Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre*, without land or a home, which therefore, in the good sense, will mean having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere. For this is the secret of successful sauntering. He who sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all ; but the saunterer, in the good sense, is no more vagrant than the meandering river, which is all the while sedulously seeking the shortest course to the sea. But I prefer the first, which indeed is the most probable derivation, for every walk is a sort of crusade, preached by some Peter the Hermit in us, to go

Horæ Solitariæ

forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the Infidels."

A more dangerous arraigner of *Horæ Solitariæ* is Lamb. In one of his essays he has some just remarks on "books which are no books," though I think he might have spared Gibbon, if only for the notes to his great history. In attacking draught boards, however, "bound and lettered on the back," he has accused *Horæ Solitariæ* and its puissant author, whom I esteem as no less than the genius of dreams herself. Yet why was Zimmerman's dull volume in such company, if Lamb had not in secret an affection for its title? My wonder is that he could allude to it so lightly. I think I would exchange many more famous books for that Zimmerman on Solitude. Elia himself has confessed a love—"shall I be thought fantastical?"—for the names of certain poets. "The sweetest names, and which carry a perfume in the mention, are Kit Marlowe, Drayton, Drummond of Hawthornden and

Horæ Solitariae

Cowley"; and I think the inclusion of Cowley (as poet, not as delicate essayist) adds to my score. Do not the names of our childish books also hold the same rhetoric for eye and ear? They too are under the suzerainty of *Horæ Solitariae*, though I would not dare to re-open many of those priceless, dog's-eared things. We have travelled for years *non passibus æquis* and I fear that they at least are not for the fashion of these times. I should no longer expect to see a fairy slip from the pages of ——and ride upon its back. Some shackles I will bind on my incredulity; the book shall be shut for ever. I have sometimes been reproached for my ignorance of Defoe. Everybody tells me that he is a great writer, and I am disposed to believe so. But he is for me "a book sealed" because Robinson Crusoe was once a spirit-leaved volume. Virgil, as everybody knows, bore the name of a magician in mediæval fancies. The dark ages linger yet, are continually being re-

Horæ Solitariae

prieved ; and Defoe is a magician whom I have no wish to reduce to a stylist in competition with Mrs — or a novelist somewhat inferior to the Rev. —. All these belong to *Horæ Solitariae*, they are her nimble peltasts. A little apart upon the shelves are the hoplites of her forces. Most of them are in Latin, chosen for the fascination of their promise and the dulness of their contents. What, for example, could more daintily stir the epicurean in such things than the title—

“Calchantis Veronensis
De Mendacibus Præclaris
Libri Quattuor,”

“Concerning liars of renown”?—who will be included? or rather, who will not? The list begins with Adam, an ingenuous amateur: the only comment on each one is an evil enumeration of his punishment. For its name,

“Liber Somniorum
et Miraculorum,”

“The Book of Dreams and Marvels” is no bad lieutenant to *Horæ Solitariae*, but con-

Horæ Solitariae

cerning its contents as Sterne would have written. Close by is a volume of old letters,

“Foliis Mandata,”

“In the keeping of mere leaves,” a graceful Virgilian title that hides small treasure. One letter, nevertheless, apparently of the seventeenth century, does some service to *Horæ Solitariae*. It is a fair indication of the contemporary feeling for Nature, as still having something malign in her strongholds, the resort perhaps of the dethroned deities (or “devils”) of Greece and Rome.

“This day” runs the letter, “the wayes were too foule for the mare (that now goeth faster than I towards age) I did walk to the minster. Marian and Jannet and my good wife Ann did accompany mee, but fell behind by reason of much greating with the neighbours, and I was presently alone in Master Jeffreys his high grove of great trees. As thou art my deare friend I do confess and I am yet upon the tenters for it, that I did there take delight in a kind of phantastickal melancholia that was like a warme bedde on a cold morning so as I was loth to give it up. If I may beleeeve mine eyes that bee little dimmed, the great trees were of the hew of

Horæ Solitariae

alchymy and brave and wanton as a shoppe in Chepe. I do beleewe I came nigh to that sinne of His People in the wilderness that they sinned as Scripture hath it in bowing down before the Golden Calf. Hadde I met my lord Bishop I think he hadde seen the hooffs of the devill in my visnomy. But my wife suddenly comming on to me and asking whether the stone annoied me yet? I did forgette this trumperie. Pray for mee, as thou art my deare friend and brother."

I have been fain even to bind fictitious copies of such books as elude my purse or search. The title for example, "Secrets of Angling" by J. D. has excited the envy of many: it is alas! only a MS. copy so bound.

I have journeyed through perhaps more of the kingdom of *Horæ Solitariae* than the kindest saunterer could enjoy. I hope, at least, that I have not too noisily talked of some things that should belong to silence. An old-fashioned, somewhat pedantic title, it has come to have a sweetness—as if the desert rock should gush with dew—like that which clings to the Latin names of plants. "Anemone nemorosa"—what a full sonority

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incomparable. In a garden in late autumn one may find by a few grey stalks and haggard flowers the gardener's label, on which the sounding name reads like an epitaph and the thing itself a stone above the dead. This book has a similar note. It has spoken to me in the fields or under the forest, and has a special blessing in the silences of autumn—by day, when the trees seem to have reached great age all at once, seem in truth to be the oldest things on earth and yet to smile;—by night, when the moon grows lonelier and lonelier in the chill, blue spaces overhead, when the noise as of immense wings quaking at the horizon almost ceases, and the only sound is one leaf justling with another in an overcrowded grave or, most silent of all sounds, a swallow passing in the darkness.

II

Two Scholars

MAGICAL powers like those imputed to the flesh of mummies abide in the languages we call dead. They have the mystery of death,—of resurrection, too,—of a perpetual life in death, not due to the disentombing of antiquaries, but to the loyalty of one distinguished class. This class of scholars truly is magnificently repaid. *Vitai lampada tradunt*. Without them the lamp would have fallen and expired. They, like vestals, dwell apart, keep ever burning the holy fire, and claim their immunities. The glories of the languages haunt also their husbandmen.

Nothing so troubled the old Roman, troubled him even in his grave, as a thought that the rites of the hearth might be neglected,

Two Scholars

and offerings to dead ancestors left unbrought. Therefore a sanctity awaited the heir that fulfilled these duties ; and even such a sanctity clothes the scholar that cherishes their ancient speech. Yet the glory about him is like the glory of fire in a lampless room,—that “counterfeits a shade.” For it is pathetic that the language in which

“Saintly Camilus lived and firm Atilius died,”

that the language of those who fought at Marathon, should, if they have not perished, no longer be transmitted with the mother’s milk to her son. Their posterity cannot read their epitaphs. Montaigne was nursed by one who spoke Latin, and he heard nothing save that tongue around his cradle ; but it was not in his blood ; he records, in fact, that his Latin gradually degenerated, until he lost the use of it. In this way, the handling of Greek and Latin gives a solemnity, a touch of pathos, to the scholar. But he is often poor. The words that would lay open the gates of

Two Scholars

heaven are impotent at the tradesman's door.
The world calls Greek—

“Greek in a hut, with water and a crust,
—Learning, forgive us!—cinders, ashes, dust.”

Still, learning is not ill paid. If it were, so also would the martyr be, and mighty poets that have died before their fame was born. He that soweth roses must not look for apples, or even poppies. “Aristotle is more known than Alexander,” says Democritus Junior, “yet I stand not upon this; the delight is what I aim at; so great pleasure, such sweet content, there is in study.” It is much to speak the tongue that Shakespeare spoke, but more perhaps to speak the tongue of Greece that gave light, and Rome that gave fire, to the world. The scholar has upon his lips imperial accents. When I speak a line of Greek I seem to taste nectar and ambrosia. As in Heine's fable the eagle of Jupiter was with him, antiquated and mournful though it might be, in his exile on a northern island; so the eagle accompanies the scholar.

Two Scholars

There is ever something ideal in the "dead languages." They cannot be invaded, but remain crystallized immortally. *Cæsar semper Augustus* were words of incantatory effect on mediæval ears ; and the sound of Greek falls freshly upon the mind, with a surprise, still as great as to the scholars of the Renaissance when Learning returned from her Babylonish captivity. So much so that we often praise the classic for a thought which in a modern would perhaps draw little attention. For the medium is as divine as marble ; and we might say with Michelangelo, of certain modern works, "If this were to become marble, alas for the antiques." De Quincey forgets his assumed contempt for the classical world when he remembers the sound of ἐπομπεύε, or *Consul Romanus*. . . .

I remember once, travelling in a southern county of England, coming across a servant who, even without his melancholy, seemed no ordinary man, and spoke with a kind of splendour that was new to me. He was tall,

Two Scholars

and had been straight, but now walked with a majestic stoop, though like Vulcan he limped. He was past middle age, his woes were of the kind that invite expressions of sympathy. On my inquiring what might be his misfortune, he answered in tones so carefully modulated as to appear half satiric, “*Eheu! mater mea obiit hodie. O causa meæ vivendi sola senectæ.*” The words, however, seemed to carry their own balm; his face glowed continually, as we talked for several minutes together, without a word that would have made Quintilian stare and gasp. His thoughts moved gracefully in a pomp of altisonant syllables. Sometimes he spoke English, but returned happily to Latin in the flashes of humour with which he referred to the university,—when, for example, he spoke of a languishing literary society (that had expelled him for a freak of classicism) as equalling the number of the good, and no more—

“*vix numero sunt totidem, quot
Thebæ portarum vel divitis Ostia Nili.*”

Two Scholars

He felt like a swallow kept among the starlings of a cold clime, while his fellows had flown eastward. . . . When I last heard of him, he was earning his bread by the composition of advertisements for a firm of merchants, and thus at last he found a subject matter adaptable to his peculiarly florid but melodious eloquence. I recognized with a sigh more than one of his favourite mighty words thus fallen.

In C—shire, I know a hamlet (a mere capful of houses) that lies, dimly seen below the high-perched road, like a cluster of straw beehives, under a great wood. Even these few houses are divided from one another by several tiny streams, that run in and out like gay, live things. Thither I descended one twilight from the hills, to buy honey from a cottager. It was August. Across the road went a stream, a tinkling chain of silver beads, presently buried in trees, on which the uncertain light was mixed with shade. Here and there were sombre alders, noisy still with

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the delicate southern voices of invisible birds. Here and there were poplars with a sound, not of running water, but of rain (the shower apparently dying away now and then as the wind fluctuated). And in the sunset among those enormous hills a bell was ringing out a melancholy sweet *sic transit*. . . . There was some light outside, but none in the low room, where the beekeeper was writing. He rose and greeted us with a bow. Then he left us, after lighting a candle for our good, and one for his own use in a loft where the honey was stored. The wooden frame, gray from the touch of his hands, was contrasted with the dewy, amber cells. While we were completing the purchase, and talking, he surprised us by answering in Latin, *Omnibus una quies*, etc., which Dryden has rendered thus :—

“Their toil is common, common is their sleep ;
They shake their wings when morn begins to
peep ;
Rush thro’ the city gates without delay ;
Nor ends their work but with declining day.”

Two Scholars

Pronounced by a mellow elegiac voice, this speech interested us profoundly.

Next day we went again with a freshened memory of the Georgics. He was never once at a loss, though we seldom spoke except in hexameters of Virgil. He had lived a large, roaming life, full of outward adventure, chiefly on the plains of America. Thither he had gone in his youth, accomplished in nothing but books, and those Latin and Greek. Notwithstanding, he had amassed great wealth. Of this a mighty accident—a prairie fire, or some such insurrection of the elements—had all but despoiled him, and he came home at the end of middle life to Wales. There he took to bee farming. Economy and hard work had made his life comfortable, and might have made it luxurious, for he was said to be rich. He remained unmarried. He had no kinsmen. He made no friends: two aged women of the hamlet were accustomed to tend him in occasional sicknesses. For the rest, he was contented, if not happy, with his

Two Scholars

bees and a few books, mainly Delphin classics. The bees would answer his call as they answered the smitten brass ; and only when thus engaged on a tranquil summer evening did he betray a mellow complacency, except when with his books. He took pleasure in Claudian's verses on the sirens ; Virgil, however, was his dearest author. Virgil was his oracle in all matters ; he practised *sortes Virgilianæ* : to him, rhyme was reason. His life was almost perfectly that of a scholar. After adventure, after witnessing the downfall of kings, and great peoples embattled one against another, after shipwreck and scenes of violent death, he concluded that

“ the tears of Imogen
Are things to brood on with more ardency
Than the death-days of Empires.”

He finds a refuge from the shadows of the world among the realities of books.

But, says one, your knowledge is nothing until another has acknowledged it. He contradicts that entirely. He knows that at least

Two Scholars

intellectual pleasure and the dulcitudes of a sane self-approval are by no means like snowflakes in the river, and that real joy holds within itself the germs of an endless self-reproduction. Electra, Aspasia, Lesbia, are sweet friends to him, when Orestes and Pericles and Catullus have been many centuries underground. Cæsar is nearer to him than Napoleon, and Thyrsis nearer than either. Experience has not impaired or clogged his imagination. If it has taught him anything, it has taught him the worth of silence. We often found him by the river, "dazed," in Virgilian phrase, "by the mighty motion of the tide." He told us himself that he was often "drunk with silence." In such moments, as we afterwards learned, he had monitions of an after life—monitions arising merely, it may be, from a thought that from things with which he was in completest sympathy no separation was possible. He was to become part of the viewless winds. No writing of his remains ; and it is improbable that he

Two Scholars

was ever satisfied with his attempts. But, with what is perhaps the true spirit of the scholar, he laughs at the notion that to expect the approbation of posterity is unconsoling and vain. With a touch of pleasantry, he said, on one of my visits: "My door is not strong enough to keep out the feeblest person in the hamlet; yet when I close it, I effectually shut out the whole world; like Heinsius, I bolt the door, excluding ambition, passion, desire, the children of ignorance and nurslings of sloth, and in the very bosom of eternity I sit down with a supreme content in the company of so many famous minds, that I compassionate the mighty who know naught of this my felicity." Yes! "in the bosom of eternity," anticipating and making little of death. When we last parted, "Death," he said, "always brings into my mind those closing verses of the last Eclogue, 'Ite domum saturæ — venit Hesperus — ite capellæ!'"

III

Epitaphs as a Form of English Literature

A WALK through Westminster Abbey commonly fills me with far other sentiments than the "kind of melancholy, or rather thoughtfulness, that is not disagreeable," such as Addison records. Despite the natural awe at those monuments at strife with time I cannot help a feeling of dissatisfaction. Some time ago I lighted upon James Thomson's epitaph—

"Tutor'd by thee, sweet Poetry exalts her voice
to ages, and informs the page with music, image,
sentiment, and thought, never to die !"

and could not but marvel at its insipidity. That we must all become authors on some melancholy day, and in large type publish

Epitaphs as a Form

our wisdom on a tomb, is a thought which should by now have been domesticated among us. Our epitaphs should in their own way be as perfect as our puffs or notices to trespassers. One would expect the epitaph to swell our books of verses, and that it is not so is a little surprising ; for the publicity and endurance of the epitaph make it undoubtedly a piece of authorship. Moreover, the solemnity or privacy of the subject is no excuse for modesty in an age that loves to exhume the shivering bones of old affections and adopts letter-writing as a form of art. Mr Browne, the butcher, would, of course, hardly care to see his name over a set of verses of dubious import ; nor would Poluphloisbos, M.P., or Achromatos, R.A., care to see in print the truth about his merits or demerits. But we should surely be the gainers by more practice of the art of epitaphs. We should no longer blush to see in the broad light of day what was written through tears by a mind perturbed. Style would certainly gain. Marble

of English Literature

is no vulgar material, and cannot be wasted like foolscap ; the author would be as much exalted by using marble as the goldsmith by using gold, and the richness of the medium would act as a check and corrective of matter and style. I think I can detect in the best styles something of the lapidary economy, and the Greek genius was probably chastened by the ἐπιτύμβια.

With some unconscious irony, in his remarks on Pope's epitaphs, "to define an epitaph is useless," says Dr Johnson ; "everyone knows that it is an inscription on a tomb." One might as well say that a book is a lot of white paper badly soiled, or a man a forked radish. A definition is indeed hard ; but to distinguish it from the elegy, which is meditative, cool, written after the first stings of regret, and, as a rule, longer, I should say that an epitaph is exclamatory, in the nature of a sigh, a cheer, a farewell, as in—

"O rare Ben Jonson !"

Epitaphs as a Form

or, as I have seen in a country churchyard—

“Fuisti ! eheu !”

or, as in the petulant modern sob—

“Si nous avions vécu !”

and having the compact unity of the sonnet. Pope's epitaphs I should exclude. If anything they are bad eulogies ; and they have a false brevity, which is a matter of words and not of thought. On the limits of the epitaph it is hard to speak more definitely. A good epitaph is still harder to define. It must be terse. But English terseness is usually represented by such things as—

“One butt sufficed a mighty Duke to drown,
Thee not a hundred butts, Good old John Brown.”

Greek terseness by such as this—

“ Δοῦλος Ἐπίκτητος γενόμεν, καὶ σῶμ' ἀνάπηρος,
καὶ πενίην Ἰρος, καὶ φίλος ἀθανάτοις.”

Truth can be of little importance in a hundred years, especially if the subject be insignificant, for who is to judge? These claimants for eternity are often the most transient of things,

of English Literature

and the soonest stale, and the epitaphs by great hands have usually so many other good qualities that we do not ask about their truth.

“Wouldst thou heare what man can say
In a little? Reader, stay!
Underneath this stone doth lye
As much beauty as could dye:
Which in life did harbour give
To more virtue than doth live.
If at all she had a fault,
Leave it buried in this vault.
One name was Elizabeth,
Th’ other let it sleep with death:
Fitter, where it dyed, to tell,
Than that it liv’d at all. Farewell.”

This “Epitaph on Elizabeth L. H.” by Ben Jonson is not his best, but, among so many of such beauty, who shall name the best? Perhaps some would choose that beginning—

“Weep with me all you that read
This little story:
And know, for whom a tear you shed,
Death’s selfe is sorry.”

In nearly all the Elizabethan epitaphs there is a rare combination of wit, a robust tender-

Epitaphs as a Form

ness, and profoundness, and none of those writers' bribes to St Peter—

“When all is done, upon the tomb is seen
Not what he was but what he might have been.”

Nicholas Grimald, a less famous contemporary, wrote several excellent things in the good style, savouring neither of maudlin speediness nor of heartless raillery in the composition. Here is his epitaph on Sir James Wilford, in the form of a sonnet:—

“The worthy Wilford's body, which, alyve,
Made both the Scot and Frenchman sore adrad :
A body, shapte of stomake stout to strive
With forein foes : a corps, that coorage had
So full of force, the like nowhere was ryfe :
With hert as free as ere had gentle knight :
Now here in grave (thus changeth, ay, this lyfe)
Rests, with unrest to many a wofull wight
Of largesse great, of manhood, of forecast
Can ech good English souldiour bear record.
Speake Laundersey, tell Muttrel marvails past :
Crye Musselborough : praise Haddington thy
lord,
From thee that held both Scots and frekes of
France :
Farewell, may England say, hard is my chaunce.”

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In the series of verses on Sidney's death, printed with Spenser's "Astrophel," is a so-called "epitaph," by an unknown author, beginning—

"To praise thy life, or waile thy worthie death."

It is an elegy like the rest, but the last verses make a noble epitaph. Here is the last :—

"That day their Hannibal died, our Scipio fell ;
Scipio, Cicero, and Petrarch of our time !
Whose virtues, wounded by my worthless rime,
Let Angels speak, and heaven thy praises tell."

But Spenser's own genius was elegiac ; I do not think he had the concentrating power necessary for epitaphs. The same is true, with hardly an exception, of Milton. His epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester and the *Epitaphium Damonis* are no epitaphs, and would cover the Pyramid of Cheops. Marvell has several that are in his best style, which is to say, first rate. Here is one :—

"Enough ; and leave the rest to fame ;
'Tis to commend her, but to name.

Epitaphs as a Form

Courtship, which, living, she declined,
When dead, to offer were unkind.
Where never any could speak ill,
Who would officious praises spill ?
Nor can the truest wit, or friend,
Without detracting her, commend ;
To say, She lived a virgin chaste
In this age loose and all unlaced,
Nor was, when vice is so allowed,
Of virtue or ashamed or proud ;
That her soul was on heaven so bent,
No minute but it came and went ;
That, ready her last debt to pay,
She summed her life up every day ;
Modest as morn, as mid-day bright,
Gentle as evening, cool as night ;
'Tis true ; but all too weakly said :
'Twas more significant, She's dead."

The epitaph on Dryden—

"Glorious John !"

is one of the best in a century which reduced the art to a sort of good roundhand, so that really the finest were Gray's on a cat, Arbuthnot's on a greyhound,* Goldsmith's on a dog, Cowper's on a hare, if we

* See page 34.

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exclude Burns.¹ Since then I cannot but think it has fallen into neglect. Byron's on Pitt, and others of that class, cannot count as epitaphs. But might not the practice of this art be resuscitated? It is a noble class of literature. It has great precedents. Its subject is the most moving of all. Or, are we to be convinced, with Cowley—

“’Tis folly all that can be said
By living mortals of th’ immortal dead,
And I’m afraid they laugh at the vain tears we
shed”?

Surely none would be the worse, and the writer would be the better who, whether in prose or verse, labelled tersely and sympathetically his subject's life. We should not then find realism masquerading as truth, as in this—

“In 67 months she was tapped 66 times ;
Had taken away 240 gallons of water,
Without ever repining at her case,
Or ever fearing the operation.”

¹ See note at end.

Epitaphs as a Form

Have we no new thoughts on Death? That Death brings to one level his contemporators, too, nobody will say, after the lovely Elizabethan epitaphs and the fantastic conceits of any eighteenth century collection. Here and there, even yet a rustic rhymester does his part, as I think, not ignobly, in this from a churchyard in South Wales :—

“Thou hast kept faith, my gentle Death : hail !
thou

Firm, last companion to us all below :

Who, once thou hast clasp'd hands, with friends
ne'er breakest vow.

But, fie on Life, that me, who loved her so,
Has unresisting given to Death, her foe.”

There is a quaintness and strangeness in the thought which bears out the limping rhymes.

Note.—Arbuthnot's epitaph is this : (was ever mockery so tender or so sublime ?)—

“To the Memory of

SIGNOR FIDO.

An *Italian* of good Extraction ;

who came into *England*,

not to bite us, like most of his Countrymen,

but to gain an honest Livelihood :

of English Literature

He hunted not after Fame,
yet acquired it :
Regardless of the praise of his Friends,
but most sensible of their Love ;
Tho' he lived amongst the Great,
he neither learn'd nor flatter'd any Vice :
He was no Bigot,
tho' he doubted of none of the Thirty-Nine Articles :
and if to follow Nature,
and to respect the Laws of Society,
be Philosophy,
he was a perfect Philosopher,
a faithful Friend,
an agreeable Companion,
a loving Husband,
Distinguish'd by a numerous Offspring,
all which he lived to see take good *Courses* :
in his old Age he retir'd
to the House of a Clergyman in the Country,
where he finished his earthly Race,
and died an Honour and an Example to the whole
Species.
Reader,
This stone is guiltless of Flattery ;
For he to whom it is inscrib'd
was not a Man,
but a
GREYHOUND."

IV

Inns and Books

WITH senses not averse from the savour-some domesticities of the house, I looked patient as I waited for dinner. Presently, unable to sit still, I went to the shelf of books. Every one was religious and of the eighteenth century. I sat down again. But now the steak was audibly squealing in the pan ; and I rose, looked out of the window without interest in the sunset, shut the door, and took down from the shelf Beveridge's *Private Thoughts*. For years I had known the volume in dull bookstalls, and had but a foolish hope that I should be amused, when

“——like a pleasant thought
When such are wanted——”

I broke the wax that had united two blank

Inns and Books

leaves and found, in a good hand and spelling that was none the worse for being bad, the names and histories of the old owner's favourite dogs. Doll, Turk and Basto, Sylvia and Mirth—in that poor inn they made a happy music,

“A cry more tuneable
Was never holla'd to, nor cheer'd with horn,
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly.”

There was Dash, too, a spaniel of course, whom the same gracious hand had sketched in a river among cool reeds and willows swishing, with windy birches that seemed in full gallop beyond.

My fortune has not always been so good, and many times after a day with the May-fly or March brown I have thought that, considering how pleasant a portion of our life is passed at inns, their provision of books is inadequate. A railway waiting-room has (sometimes) tables of trains. At a hotel, Whitaker, Bradshaw, a directory, and a bad

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novel are wholesome enough between meals and calls. At an inn, however, we need more than "twenty ballads stuck about the wall," or a collection of hunting prints and an indestructible picture of "The Soul's Awakening." On coming down to breakfast early and asking after the colour of the stream, these are singularly filling; the last-named always puts one in a merry humour. But what have I to do with the last ride of Black Bess or the Derby winner of 1860 when I return with a full creel and a delightful hunger at sunset?

I have been caged for hours in a newly-papered room, with four large Bibles and a treatise on something, while on the walls is hung "Swearing is forbidden." I am not superstitious, but once, at The Three Dragons, finding *Johnson's Dictionary*, I practised *sortes* with it, and found this quotation from Donne, illustrating the verb "inn":—

"In thyself dwell ;
Inn anywhere : continuance maketh hell."

Inns and Books

Just above were the words of Spenser :—

“Death is an equal doom

To good and bad, the common inn of rest.”

I seemed to know that inn. But an inn should be a place where we find what we have ceased to expect at home, and not a mere “home from home” as I have seen it modestly advertised.

An impulse as sick and as profound as the *fatigue du nord*, or as that which drove Richard Jefferies from inland meadows to the sea, goads some of us to the life of inns. Something, we may think, that overpowers the delicious sense of home, bids us exchange that for an abode that is a truer symbol of our inconstant lodging on the earth. There we are independent of every one save the boots. We can obey or ignore a distant summons easily. Perhaps even the last summons would not sound so shrill. If I had a wish that would be met, I could wish to die at an inn, a prey only to very tranquil regrets, and without that too in-

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dignant reluctance that makes every death a breach greater than the experience of a hundred centuries might have taught—

“To cease upon the midnight with no pain.”

“Landlord,” said a merry man, who lay dying at the Rising Sun, “you can take down the sign to-night.” Shakespeare probably lived half his life in taverns, and though he may not have been happy, yet the delight of witnessing the restless scene, oneself so restless and easily erased, must have been a magnificent atonement; at least it inspired the kindest and amplest humanity.

In several inns I have—before candles were brought in—fancied myself on board a ship in strange seas, or in a lonely camp. I seem then to be of no nation or class. The great lord “knows no such liberty.” On a sharp November night, when the sky is swept broad and clean, and garnished with stars that wink as if the wind fluttered

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them, one may enjoy at a small inn amidst a grey country the lonely monarchy of a helmsman at sea. The host has gone. I am the only guest. . . . It is so silent that I cannot endure the throne of tyrant over the night and all that is night's. I turn gladly to the wood fire that crackles like the laughter of children, and grins like the mask of comedy. But the books? . . . The cracked spinet is burdened with china (instead of the light fingers that tripped over the keys, "laughing as they went"); and if it is vocal still to sympathetic ears, it seems to murmur only "Auld Lang Syne," as if it were a sad *revenant*, when all the house is still.

There were no books among the china, but one leg of the spinet was propped by some tattered calf, and above that *The Young Man's Best Companion*. It was a kind of inoffensive cyclopædia, a shabby and comical pedlar of useless information. There was too a frontispiece—a gowned

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master with a raised didactic hand, like an eighteenth-century statue, evidently correcting the faulty geometry of a bland youth whose stoop was full of condescending patience and interest ; and underneath, these verses :—

“’Tis to the Press and Pen we Mortals owe
All we believe, and almost all we know ;
All hail the great preservers of those Arts
That raise our thoughts and cultivate our parts.”

We too can share the joy of the young man sauntering from the page on which he was “being made acquainted with the mother tongue—viz., English” to the chapter on “secret writing” ; or the “short lines for text ‘hand,” such as “Wisdom is the principal thing—Wise men are scarce”—“Expect to receive as you give—Frequent good company”—or “Yesterday cannot be recalled—Zeno and Zenobia,” lines which are full of a working philosophy and of truth, especially the third. The young man even now might turn to the dictionary where I learned that

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“hart” meant “in the woods, or an overgrown buck.” In another place I read “Beauty is commendable in some, but it ruins others.” There are two obvious remarks to make about nearly everything, and it is one of the charms of *The Young Man's Best Companion* that it usually says both.

The other book was of a sterner age. Called *The Dividing of the Hooff; or seeming Contradictions throughout Sacred Scriptures, Distinguished, Resolved, and Applied*, it was by William Streat, “Master of arts and preacher of the Word in the County of Devon,” of date 1654. The dedication, to the Deity, was in letters so large that were I to copy them here, I should be paid at almost the same rate as the most successful writer of our time. But the dedicatory essay is penned in a style whose rhetoric has a Miltonic pomp without the Miltonic luxuriance, as in this—

“Is the sword that fights against thee girt upon
thine owne thigh? . . . Are the worst enemies

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those of thine owne house? O who can appease such quarrels! End such controversies! Lay the fury of such battels as are fought in heaven!" . . .

The explanations were not without ingenuity and force; here and there were blasts of the same rhetoric; and I caught a characteristic note of that age in the signature of the dedication.

"Thy most humble and everlasting servant,
My name thou hast written in heaven."

Yet I could not but envy the certainties of the man who could sincerely write—

"Our way to heaven is none of the broadest. The author hath found it strait, and his endeavour now is to communicate some of his owne spiritual enlargements by presenting the same Pilot himselfe hath." . . .

And thus one knows why the Puritan looked so sourly on the world, and why the world smiled at him.

An old Calendar may often be found at the inn, and will be worth opening, especially if enriched, alongside the weather forecast, by the first owner's notes. Among many I

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have seen the *British Merlin* of the eighteenth century, "adorned with many delightful and useful verities, fitting all capacities in the islands of Great Britain's monarchy," and compiled "for his country's benefit" by Cardanus Rider. Here too I have discovered the planets that rule over the names of children, and have smiled at the number of Colleys during Cibber's ascendancy. Yet I have rarely found the right book (an odd volume of Richardson or Sterne); less often have I brought it with me. I have read Browning where I longed for Prior. I have put up with Shakespeare where the ale, the signboard, and the host wanted Massinger. Now, I can only pray that I shall meet Jeremy Taylor not Bishop Hall—Smollett and not Goldsmith's *Natural History*. It was perhaps my best fortune to fall in with a volume called *The Unknown Way*. Left behind by some tired reviewer, it may be, after a perusal that bred only a few jests, the book was still new. It was after mid-

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night. The Welsh hills rose all around, their flanks vaster than the sky, and pricked, as it were, by cottage lights. Now and then the lightning snapped a fiery finger. At length enormous ridgy clouds moved along and encamped upon the summits of the range, and in the flashes they seemed to be castles that extended their towers like imprecating arms to heaven. The moon sailed up, and, no stronger than if she breathed into the night, a wind puffed amid a lane of poplars with a liquid whisper as I read many and many a lovely verse, and lastly these :—

“Now, till morn, remain our own
Magic shores of old surmise,
Peaks no morning can dethrone,
Lands that know no boundaries—
There the unfulfilled abides ;
There the touch of night unbars
Gates of ways that noonday hides,
Paths that reach beyond the stars.”

For criticism one may go to Fleet Street.
For appreciation I am resolved to visit the
Merlin Arms again.

V

Exiles at Play

FOR a little time, we turned aside into a circuit of brown walls. They and two aerial, pointed arches were the remains of a famous abbey: and it was pleasant still to lie under a tall, gracious linden, that stood on the site of the west front. Several Welsh maidens joined us presently. They were very sprightly, setting free their hair, singing, and laughing continually. One climbed the wall, and posing motionless in a niche, made an effective Madonna; only her tresses were blown over her face, like wings. But it was a plaintive place—the generous Catholic and Apostolic oven cold and ruinous—desolate the great barn wherein the winnowing fan rose and fell murmurously, and the dust

Exiles at Play

was gilded all day, seen through the open door. Nevertheless, we paced in fancy down umbrageous, overtraceries cathedral aisles. In fancy we spied the carver of that celandine flower on the hidden face of a slab, with the legend: *Jam mens prætrepidans avet vagari*. We heard in fancy the dewy voices of the choir singing together lonesomely.

On the walls and about the still perfumed linden a glow was tarrying as we left. It was an amber fervid evening. In the placid, breathless sunset, over the colours of the sky folded a harmonizing mist. Footsore wayfarers now and again found a pretext for turning round to take a last look at the sun. All the world gazed westwards ;—on the gate of many a cottage lay a long white hand, growing transparent in the sad light, and looking wonderful against the torrid blue sky ; and the unquiet stars seemed to hang in their black hair as the women lingered. A waggon or two glided along the horizon. The

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poplars, that all day had sung and shivered busily, "with a sound of showers," muffled their heads, put on a cloak of silence and gloom. We expected words like diamonds or fine gold from our host ; but he answered in Welsh, which was a second best. Until the hour for candles, we listened to Welsh songs, devised sweetly about the streams and hills of the very place where we lay. Then the moon gave the word : *Monte dans la tour d'ivoire et advienne que pourra*. And this was my dream.

Low, massy, and in colour auburn, the full moon was perched upon a hill-top, very near ; etched in black on its surface was the skeleton of an elm. To the cottager moving in his orchard it hung like a great fruit, upon each tree in turn. The rooks, even yet, were crossing the sky from side to side, straight to the moon. We kept it in sight until it grew pallid and frail in the cold wind, and rose in the centre of its hazy circles, pent in like some white maiden by a magician's lines, for

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ever haunted by the pale grey and crocus circles. Before us lay a broad estuary—moon-enriched, and presently like an even silver trencher, with tree shadows upon it like islets of ebony. A little starry rivulet flowed past us. And on one hand a long road wound upward, shining white, to the top of a hill, and then—the moon, with all her stars. . . . This road—and the wind that traded in freshest perfumes—enticed us forth. It passed near to the abbey ; and on the way, we met nobody. Not even an owl was abroad.

Now and then a leaf fidgeted. A butterfly slept on a branch, like a flower.

The abbey was faintly lighted by torches, upheld by four girls one at each corner of the nave, who were clad in white raiment. The girls were immobile ; their torches gave a pleasant smell in burning. But the light hardly touched the chancel, where several figures, all in white, save two that wore purple, were standing. They were five :

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three men, two women ; and the men were more aged than the women. The two eldest might have been brothers. Both had faces deeply trenched, and the eyes almost shut by overmuch weeping ; but the long beard and locks of the one were black, over his purple cloak ; he held manacles in one hand, as if he were gaoler to his own captives ; his voice was like a passing bell ; and he was a head shorter than the second. The snow white hair of the other was well preened, and helped the lines of his face—worn perhaps as much by deep joy as by suffering—to add a grace to his august demeanour. Stooping a little, his expression was always courteous and benign. A festal garland encircled his head. From time to time he sighed, but like one whose grief has grown old along with him. The third was lame, and leant on an ivory staff. His face was haggard and tanned ; his beard grew like a furze-bush from his chin ; his mien was astringent, making one who saw it purse his lips. Yet he was the

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most active of all, tapping the floor impatiently with his staff.

They were, as I afterwards learned, *Dis, Zeus, and Hephaestus*.

So old was the elder of the women, that she scarce ever moved ; yet the gracious oval of her face was almost flawless, her hair all gold. She seemed to be blind ; for her eyes never looked earthwards, and when possible she held the younger woman's sleeve. Her lips were still lax and full and red, after trembling with passionate speech—Where were her altars ? Where were the offerings of fruit and wine and flowers that once smelt so delicately to her in the twilight ? The younger woman was a copy of her done in pearl, instead of marble, and so tenderer and of more evasive beauty. Her raven hair was all of her that looked real, covering her as clouds the moon when it has waned many autumn days. From all the rest, except the elder woman, she shrank away, especially from the black beard ; but her wandering

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touch she met with a shudder of joy. Standing at her left heel, haunting her when she moved, was a leopard, his face towards the light, with a look of wonder, but silent, and one eye flashing. Afterwards, when she went out, he followed, and did not return.

Soon came in a sixth person, one that would have been no more than a man, without his subtle and piercing eyes. He bore a *rhabdos*. Before the others, he broke silence, though what he said, even what he meant, I could not guess, until I heard a wave of sound begin to plunge with the words *aklaustos, ataphos*—unlamented, without a tomb. Amazed, I asked one of the torch-bearers what it meant.

“I am from Sicily,” she answered.

“I am from Sicily, and my name is Arethusa. Many a time and oft, I used to hear celebrations of my name and power. But those yonder were mightier far than I. They are the Gods; and since time now

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weighs heavily upon them, they try to lighten it and warm their frozen hearts with the remembrance of true human woe, and of

‘Sad stories chanced in the times of old.’

The acting of old tragedies is a great joy to us. We love Euripides above all. *Alcestis* almost caused us to have hope. The agonies of *Electra* revived our own, and in the hot rush of blood that followed it, we felt that we were alive at least. Even now, they are acting the *Hecuba*. Zeus plays Agamemnon: Dis — *Odysseus*: Hephæstus — *Polymestor*: Hermes—both *Polydorus* and *Talthybius*: Demeter plays *Hecuba*: her child Persephone — *Polyxena*. . . . Hush! The ghost of *Polydorus* speaks; and Hecuba is at hand.”

Hermes was in fact speaking to Demeter:

“Now on the beach, now borne over the sea by ebb and flow, I lie, unlamented, without a tomb. . . . O mother! slavery instead of a queenly life is before you;

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you are fallen upon days as evil as the past was blissful ; some God lays destruction in the balance against your happiness gone by."

I kept my place beside Arethusa, who chanted, with her three fellows, the words of the Chorus ; and sometimes spoke to me. The aged Demeter then spoke (" She chose this part herself," whispered the nymph at my ear) :

"Lead me, my maidens ; lend a guiding hand to me in my old age, a slave like yourselves, though once your mistress. . . . O mighty Earth ! I understand my last night's dream, the sad vision of my son secure now in Thrace, and of my sweet daughter Polyxena ; it still alarms me nevertheless. . . . For my heart broke when I saw the spotted deer torn from my shelter by a bloody wolf, and slain.—This too appals me. The shade of Achilles rose above his tomb, and claimed one of the long-suffering Trojan maidens, for a sacrifice. Let it not be, I

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beseech you, Oh ! ye gods, let it not be my daughter."

Demeter sank down upon the altar, almost in a swoon, and when the news came that her daughter was chosen, she sat on, and so made known her fate to the maiden. Arethusa laid her fingers on my sleeve in her agitation, to indicate Persephone who began to speak :

"O miserable, unhappy mother ! no longer shall I be with you : I shall not relieve the pain of your captivity with my own. You will see me torn pitifully away, offered up to Hades, and sent down to the shades, luckless even in my death. I pity and weep for thee : but my own portion I can not deplore ; it is a great good fortune to die."

Had Demeter a knife, or an adder, or some other weapon ; and would she use it against Dis as he bowed and the point of his beard swept her garment obsequiously ; —I wondered, as he came to take her daughter ; for she did much that was not in

Exiles at Play

the book. No. She was pleading with him, putting him in mind of her early hospitality at Troy :

“As a suppliant,” she cried, “you laid your hand in mine and on my cheek. I supplicate now that you fulfil the promise then made. . . . Do not take her away and slay her. *Tōn tethnēkotōn halis*—the dead are numerous enough.”

“*Tōn tethnēkotōn halis*,” I said. “*Tōn tethnēkotōn halis*,” said Arethusa. Demeter still spoke :

“She is my consolation. She is all to me. —The mighty should not for ever be exerting their strength ; nor should the prosperous think they must always prosper : for I too—but I am so no more ; I was bereft of all in a day. Go. Pity me. Go and dissuade the Greeks.”

Dis turned aside and his beard quivered as he said—

“I should like my tomb to be seen covered with honours. Such honours endure.”

Exiles at Play

The Chorus lamented with pathetic emphasis—

“Alas! how wretched it is to be a slave, to suffer evil, from necessity—*tē biā nikōmenon*.”

And Demeter stole up to Persephone and whispered—

“My words are in vain. Go you therefore,—you may be more convincing—speak, like a nightingale, with all the chords of sorrow, to avoid death. Fall at his feet—he too has children.”

What Persephone replied, I could scarcely hear, so transported was I by her exquisite dignity, the sweetness of her voice, and the tragedy that shook her. Now and then I caught such a line as *Isē theoisi plēn to katthanein monon*—“Equal to the Gods except that one day I was to die”—as she evoked scenes of her early life, when she was Hector’s sister, and, with her beauty and famous lineage, worthy of princes, *turan-nōn ēxiōmena*—“but now a slave.”

I feared she would collapse, being fragile

Exiles at Play

and tremulous as a falling wave, when she urged her mother, not to contend with the strong.

“Surely you would not be thrown down, bruised, thrust away, and ignominiously treated, by a mere youth. Nay; do not; for it is not seemly. But, dearest mother, give me your sweet hand, and let us kiss, for never more shall I behold the sun and the sunbeams, never more.”

Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, was going, but turned back, to ask what message she might take to “Hector and Priam.”

“Tell them,” was the answer, “that I am the most unhappy of women.”

Demeter was sitting as once she sat by the wayside, watching for Persephone; when Hermes entered, and thus reported the maiden’s death to “the Queen of the opulent Trojans—*Poluchrusōn Phrugōn*, the wife of the fortunate Priam.

“ . . . He beckoned to the Greek youths chosen to hold the maiden. But she, seeing

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that, spoke these words: 'Conquerors of my city, Greeks! I am willing to die, and no one shall lay hands on me. My neck shall be at your disposal. But by the Gods! leave me free and slay me, that so I may perish free; for being the daughter of a king I should be shamed if I were to die a slave.' At this, amid cries of assentation from the soldiery, Agamemnon the king bade the youths loose her. Straightway, taking her mantle from her shoulders, she tore it down to her waist, and laid bare her lovely bosom—like a statue. Then she knelt, and more boldly than ever spoke: 'Lo! if you would strike here, here is my breast; if here at my throat, it is ready.' So he, between willingness and unwillingness, for pity of her, clove the channels of her breath with his sword . . . But, though dying, she was most careful to fall as was modest and fit. And the Greeks all found a service to do for her. Some cast leaves on the corpse; others built a pyre of fir trunks, and he that did

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nothing was upbraided thus: 'Knaves! have you nothing for her that so excelled in courage and dignity?' These are my tidings to you, most blessed and yet most unhappy of mothers."

She struggled as if to rise and seek her daughter; but with a sigh merely sent one to bid the Greeks not to touch the body, and one to bring sea water for the last ablutions. At intervals she shrieked loudly. Her memory was working convulsively. She passed her days in dreams, and had become skilled in the interpretation thereof—*oneirophrōn*; so she moaned—

"O gorgeous palaces once my home! O mansions once so happy! O imperial, and in thy children most favoured, Priam!—*euteknōtate Priame*. How have we come to naught, losing our mettle." Then with despair and some contempt—

"He that lives on without accident is luckiest."

The tenth wave of passion burst, when

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a servant brought to her the corpse of Polydorus, found on the beach. She begged, entreated, commanded Zeus to help her against the murderer, Polymestor—

“I am a slave, and feeble, I grant; but the Gods are puissant; so too is the law by which even they must live . . . Therefore, stepping back like an artist before his picture, appraise my calamities . . . Or would that by some magic Dædalian or divine, I had a voice in my arms—my hands—my feet—my hair! to fall about your knees, and besiege you with weeping and persuasion.” . . .

There were cries and blows in a far-off angle of the cloisters; the false Polymestor had lost his sight and his children by the hands of Hecuba and the Trojan women. No blood, however, spoilt those white and purple garments, or the peaceful chancel.

“The Gods,” muttered Polymestor, “shuffle things this way and that, so that we may worship them out of ignorance.”

With the play, the summer night was

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drawing to an end. With voices of elvish birds that haunt the mist, I heard the Chorus singing mournfully — “One whose grief is beyond his strength may justly set himself free from this cheap life.”

The Olympians drew closer and closer together; the torches fell, hissed, and went out; the frightened swallows alighted on the chancel windows. From all eyes tears were falling fast, but not from Hecuba's: Demeter asked if those were poppies she could taste in the early wind. Agamemnon spoke briefly: Hecuba was to go bury the corpses of her children.

I could stay no longer, but as I went, I heard the Chorus singing for the last time—

“To the harbour, to the tents, my companions, and to the service of your masters Necessity is God.—*sterra gar anankē*.”

VI

The Passing of Pan

AMIDST a wood I came once upon an idiot, seated on a fallen tree, and was astonished by the classic beauty of his posture and the curls of golden hair on his head. His lips were empurpled by wild fruit. Just one bead of blood adhered to his singularly clear cheeks. The face was noble ; only the mouth was discordant — rather large, and like a child's, uncontrolled. He must have been godlike as a child. Now, all but this had grown up and left the eyes wandering and the mouth lisping in a disappointing way. Fresh and bright as the fur of a beast, his long hair was full of dead leaves, with one crow's feather. His lips continually wavered with murmuring sounds. His dress I did not observe, because, I suppose, it became him

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naturally, after the manner of all the poor. As I went by he plucked and gave me a reed. He meant to give me one with a flower, and did not see his mistake, I thought. The look of expectancy, as of a brute for food, confused me, so that he laughed, showing his red tongue between his white teeth. Before leaving, I gave him a coin, which he scornfully cast away and continued his murmuring. But I had not gone far when I heard him ferreting about in the underwood where it fell. He was searching for it doubtless, while his cry, soon after, a very melodious one, was full of triumph at the find. I had, however, nearly forgotten him, the hour verging on sunset and unfavourable to the recollection of such matters, when he came up rapidly and grunting aloud, though in perfect composure like a beast out of breath, to offer me a little sheaf of fragrant reeds, all flowerless as before. He laid the weight of his hand on my shoulder and watched my lips as I spoke, imitating them with his own,

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breathing all the time lustily into my face. With what surprise I noticed the savage but not unclean flavour of his breath and the indefinable scent of grass, herbs and bark! With a repetition of his melodious cry and a petulant stamp he went away into the wood. Afterwards I learnt that he hoarded coin for the purchase of honey, in quest of which he was irresistible. By this food he was easily intoxicated. The half malignant juices of the forest combined in the honey to overthrow the feeble brain, for Nature has odd, immoderate ways of putting into action her empire over men. For the rest, I was able to learn much of the idiot's way. He would often sit motionless for hours in the great wood, looking at naught, while the birds used rude, pretty intimacies towards him. Children had seen him listening for a voice at the trunk of an oak tree on moody summer days. Once he had been detected in a four-footed pursuit of rabbits by means of a keen, and (as it were) reasoning sense of smell.

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Years afterwards I came again. But he was painfully changed. He was tending several fat horses tethered in a lane of hawthorn and waving wild hops, where the country people sauntered by to church, gaily apparelled in purple and crimson, so as to check one's breathing on that fiery day; the neat wives bounded alongside their ungainly husbands, so light and graceful as to seem merely the clouds scattered by them in their walk. Now and then the children teased him. He recognised me at once, laying his hand tentatively on my shoulder, with the words, "I am very cold!" My teeth chattered at the touch. Being in haste, I gave him tobacco and passed onward.

Next morning I met a strolling piper at the inn, who was full of stories about his masterful pipe. In one place he had piped a city street silent, then into a dance; in another, a fellow had split his instrument that he might find the secret—a smell of tobacco smoke apparently. "But the greatest

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fun was late last night." He had been journeying towards the inn, piping a melody he had learned in Wales, when he heard footsteps following. He piped on. The steps reeled ; it must have been a drunkard. Still he pursued, through pond and copse, until he dropped, probably in cosy grasses, out in the moonlight. "But he must have risen long ago to escape the lightning and rain."

I hurried out in alarm. It must be the idiot! I said : Heaven knows how the night would deal with him.

At a distance I recognised my friend, as he lay in the short grass, with rooks feeding many yards clear of him. His loose mouth was evenly shut. His chin closed the lines of his face very handsomely with an emphasis unlike its wont, through the clinging wet beard. The rain had left his face white and polished, except where friendly small birds had been tapping the corners of his eyes, with intent to awaken him. A shower of petals had not yet shrivelled on his breast,

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and gave a fresh smell in the rainy air ; the two stately horses forgot to graze where they stood. In fact, he was dead, a clay pipe rigid between his teeth.

While I stood there, pondering the wonderful beauty of the corpse, which seemed now to be enjoying a perfect kind of life, perfect calm, certainly to be far more impressive than the moving frame, and to have gotten all that was once lacking, the piper came up. Perhaps his were the sensations of the hunter who has struck down some lovely harmless bird ; at least he was deeply moved. For he understood the whole event immediately, and readily showed when I asked for the instrument that he had been playing on the last night. To my surprise he drew from his pocket a simple set of reeds bound side by side together. They reminded me of the reeds I had been given so strangely in the wood long ago ; and to my inquiry how he had come by this peculiar kind, for the thing was evidently his own handiwork, he answered

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in such a manner that I was convinced that the dead man had been the giver of the reeds. At this he was greatly distressed, and parted eagerly with the pipe at my request. The body was buried in solitude. That day I hurried westward to a distant town.

The shorn wheat-fields in that mounded country were of a pale fluid yellow that mingled with the sky's blue, and was only here and there invaded by the lustrous green of an aftermath or the solid shadow of an immense elm ; in it the little woods actually seemed to float. Meadowsweet like foam, and a small scabious flower always haunted by blue butterflies of the same hue, lingered by the wayside, with faint red champions and cranesbills, and yellow buttercups, hawkweeds, ragwort, and agrimony spires. On a white cottage wall flowered several great red roses. In a hedge I found one hawkweed blossom of a deep flame colour, like a dusky volcanic fire creeping out of the stones, the

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colour of the sun then about to set. One or two bramble leaves had been coloured likewise, but with green veins remaining. Placid and yet luxurious, there was something in the sunset like the old age of Lucullus. The sun itself was burning mildly and warm; the dark trees towards the west lay round it like a party of children half circling a fire, and listening to strange tales.

For in September, the early evening of the year, when darkness and light, Summer and Winter, meet without contention and combine their loveliest symbols, at sunset, a profound sense of the whole past of men and Nature is born of the sense of the year that is passing and the season that is dead, and we individuals are blended with the universe in one mellow, tranquil passion of regret. Launched by this passion upon a course of many memories, I was still far from land when I fell into deep sleep; and in my sleep I had a dream.

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The mind takes a delight in contrast as one refuge from the present ; so in my dream it was broad noon ; and because the actual season was autumn, the atmosphere of my dream was that of spring, of early spring with its poignant colours. A great forest hung round about. The might of its infinite silence and repose, indeed, never ceased to weigh upon me in my dream. I could hear sounds : they were leagues away. The trees which I could see were few : I felt that they must be thousands deep on every hand. Just where I found myself, the trees opened wide apart and enclosed a fair space of sunlight and flowery grass. At the edge of this space arborets of underwood grew, whose foliage turned to rough silver in the sun. Beyond, trees of every kind clustered together, or, rather, stood each in its own demesne, at aristocratic distance, not as in English woods. Airy, noiseless acacias were there ; stilly, religious oaks ; beeches, with boughs like human limbs, disclosed here and

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there by the light cirrus foliage, and possessed of liquid voices in their glossy, humid leaves ; volatile birches ; fruit trees that mounted stiffly to a certain height, where they threw off their stony character and expanded into waves of branchwork and flying spray of leaves ; and beneath many, the palmy hemlock-climbed the air as meaner plants climb the bushes. Not one of the trees but cast an ample shadow, like the train of a mantle falling from their shoulders and spreading outward on the sward. As the day grew, the trees appeared to retreat into the wood, and leave their trains upon the grass.

Suddenly out of this great silence came the figure of a youth, walking with downward eyes, placid pace, and an attitude that expressed all the flattering thoughts of happy love and joy in life. There was much harmony in the transient grouping of his limbs, as he walked—in the raised and rounded knee, in the foot balanced on the air as on

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a step. A profusion of hair covered his temples like a tawny fleece thrown over his head in play. Coming nearer, his face told of a passion far deeper than for any maiden, though of a maiden he thought. His skin, like rose leaves, too pure to be red, too healthy to be white, had a kind of ardency or radiance, such as is seen in women, which subtly expounds a kinship between soul and mere bodily breath that men rarely show.

After he had long been in sight, a wondrous clear music arose, the music of a human voice fluting cunningly, for now and again the voice stopped and the singer let silence speak for him in the interval ; but took up the strain again, naturally as when the tones of a nightingale emerge from the quiet night, whilst the forest is listening, aware. The youth presently turned in search of this voice. In my dream I followed him.

When I saw him next, he was leaning upon a blossomy crag. The light just there

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was green under the trees like sunny ocean water. He was listening, eyes closed, "all ear."

On the other side of the crag a terrible figure stood near him, unobserved.

The figure seemed to be that of Pan, changed by the long wanderings since he fled; in advance of the general banishment of the Olympians, before the westward marches of Roman legionaries. He had often gone on hands and feet. The stones had bitten his flesh. He had drunken of his own tears. This very day the clap of axes and the volleying sound of trees falling invaded his cave. The wild bees chased him away from his customary pittance of honeycomb. Thus tormented, he was first aware of his rapid undeification. While the wild creatures avoided their suspicious co-mate more than human beings, one consolation was still effective. He retained his pipe, and could play! Moreover, sorrow had sweetened his voice—that voice to which

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the youth was listening, not by chance, it would seem, if one might judge from Pan's anxious sentry over the forest pathways, and the persistence of his tunes. The encounter was apparently aforethought, and welcome to Pan. He was surely looking for something from this stranger that other wayfarers could not give. For the many wayfarers, threading the forest like puppet forms, with all their fatigue and ungainliness, flattered the languid self-esteem of the embittered god by comparison ; so much so, that he amused himself by piping them far astray from their companions, playing upon their fears, until at last, horn and hoof under cover, in the guise of a mute rustic, he led them safely back, and disappeared without their thanks. But that was a slender triumph. Afterwards he often mused, reviewing the treasures of his memory, drawing fresh powers from silence, and compacting all into one brilliant song that took flight as if it must penetrate heaven, but falling splendidly, seemed to

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bury itself in earth with shrieks. He would then lament that this melody was mortal nevertheless ; he had listened to men singing like that ! And he was filled with a supreme pity—pity for the flowers, the grass, for all things that quickly pass away. To prove his old supremacy in music he must, then, compete with one of the loftiest among those mortals whom he so despised. With this in view, he seemed now to be in peaceable ambuscade ; yet with such a rival, he would loathe to do his best.

The song he was now singing made much of reminiscences of the old time, but seemed to have been turned in such a way that it should overpower the youth by the strange fascination of the forest life, enjoyed in animal liberty and with spiritual reflection. It expressed the inexpressible magic of certain hours and places ; of autumn's holy purple eve, for example ; of landscapes beheld in a kind of haze of the spirit ; of the moon-enriched flood, the moon aloft with all her

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stars. It was full of the idiom of trees and the motion of great waters.

At a pause in the song, the youth quaked to see the horned brow, the fleecy hair on the legs, and the slender bony calves ending in cloven feet, that seemed to connect the singer with the brutes, whose covering changes character in some one place at least, as at heel or muzzle, as if to remind one of the earth.

The song broke again in a fountain of clear sound from the coarse throat. One hand lay on the youth's neck, like ice ; the other hung down, grasping a seven-reeded pipe, which Pan raised to his own lips in the pauses and seemed to play — but silently. Something fond crept into the expression of that touch and the anxious little eyes fixed on the youth, as though to evoke and translate his inmost thought. Pan also was leaning on the rock, but towered above the youth. For by a brute-like artifice he was hoisted up so that only the point of one foot grated the earth.

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After he had again checked the melody, Pan offered the reeds to the youth, earnestly inviting him to play. But he refused. When the god insisted, he refused a second time, saying, "Tempt me not. The limits of my being are overthrown. If I were to play, my music would be my doom."

To which the god, in harmonious speech, made an angry reply: "Stupid mortal! Dost thou think it a slight honour to touch this pipe? Orpheus borrowed it. The Bacchanals heard the same on Mount Cithairon. It has never changed; it will never change. The singer passes away; the song remains. Your poets have stolen it in the hush of midnight or of noon. But it is not vouchsafed to all, and lest the few betray us—lest the few betray us, we intoxicate them, we madden them, and so the world cannot believe or understand. Those who have once heard it may be sad or joyous, but their sadness is not the world's, nor their joy; there is evermore a joy in their sorrow, a sorrow in their.

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joy ; they will weep at the bridal, at the burial laugh. But none ever touched these reeds, and thou rejectest them."

"Thou hast," the youth answered fearfully, "made me hate men with thy song. How joyous I yet could be if other men were my only foes !"

"Foolish one !" cried the god. "What matters it—to lose men—if thou couldst share in the workings of the young year, be one with spring ? Deep in the forest, enthroned immortally, sits a godlike woman——." Pan had laid his hand upon the pipe that hung down in the youth's reluctant grasp, and throwing his head forward, with flashing eyes, until nothing but they and the horns could have been seen by his disciple, "Aye ! but raise not expectant eyes," he continued, as the listener was about to interrupt, "not even the gods have often seen her. We know only her thresholds. Around that throne is peace, whom thou knowest not — peace,

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where hardly the seasons bring change, where the years roll in vain, vain, at least, for harm. The very trees have voices of comfort. 'Rest, rest, perturbed earth,' is their cry. Her, too, thou mightest know. And consider what empire over the hearts of men thy new wisdom must give thee."

"Power I covet not," said the youth.

"If thou shouldst still desire what the world desires, that also thou shouldst have in plenty," Pan went on. "Your magicians dreamed of making gold from leaves. I know, I can tell thee, the mystery of the buttercup's gold — palpable sunshine ; mere earth become matter almost spiritual."

"I will not have it," murmured the youth. "Alas ! how melancholy the chill coming on of night ! I fear to-morrow's dawn. I will not play."

"Unwise ! but think of thy skill in love, having this lore," insinuated Pan.

"I will not."

"Thou couldst enjoy the liberties of earth

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and air and sea and things thou dreamst not of."

"I will not."

"Thou couldst make men wiser——."

The youth raised the pipe and began to play. First, he essayed a rural tune, from which he circled upward in widening sweep, as of eagles climbing, through love, ambition, grief, joy, and still upward to an utterance of the deep fears and hopes of men. One sound was a tone as of souls looking back with earth-memories while passing the gate of the unknown. Yet the song was puissant rather in aspiration than achievement ; and when he ceased, the singer wept at the thought of what the song might have been, crying at last, "Let me try once again !" That was unnecessary. Pan had already capitulated. He took the youth by the hand, entrusting him even with the pipe. Deeper and deeper into the forest they went. In the afternoon a gauzy moon had scaled cloud after cloud of the pallid east ; now for a moment a sole

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tender star throbbed in that one placid space of milky blue amid the tumultuous cloud ; and at length, in the quiet evening, with a few planets in the blanched blue, and a transparent golden silk drawn across the west, the gloomy, tranquil cattle were noisily ruminating in a white mist over the grass. Far away, sunny cones of wheat still glimmered on the hills. Boughs made no sound as these two passed—seemed, in fact, to yield like the arms of a sleeper when we alter their place. Now and then they halted, while Pan taught the secrets of the earth, the value of this and that blossom or stem. The fingers of the god shook like a child's as he offered the plants in turn. "This," he explained at last, with a languid purple flower in his hand, "blesses the eater with eternal bliss of sleep."

They went on, both alarmed whenever night loosened a leaf or two from the forest roof, and at the lights glancing overhead in the green clerestory of the wood, when Pan

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presently missed his companion. He had noticed the youth loitering somewhat, as if anxious to learn more, and now saw him sinking to the ground. On reaching the spot, a deep sleep already claimed him ; the purple petals lay over his cheeks like blood. "Foolish one !" sighed Pan, "he sleeps, and will never wake. As for me, I will wait no longer." Tenderly he folded the youth's white fingers across his breast, wiped the crimson lips, took away the seven-reeded pipe and began to play. Slowly, earnestly, like one making a testament, while death is still out of sight but not out of thought, he brought once again to light all the famous memories of his old life, by means of that music which was of all the most renowned. He recalled how, in hiding among the cattle at Bethlehem, he had witnessed the Nativity, with its cordon of venerable bystanders. He had been a wanderer. He had followed the chase, and his huntsmen had been those spirits of the dead who make the echo ; in

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Wales it had been called "Arthur's" hunting. The moist eyes flashed again at the thought of his gamesome tasting of the mere odours of the sacrifice, before the pious worshippers had gone and he could press his teeth into it! Now, however, the vanity of all that seemed great; he would never repeat it. He could command adoration from none: it was time to be gone. Never again should strange ardours riot in his frame after a draught of the crimson hedgerow vintages. Mortals should now take an overflowing measure of revenge for the death of Marsyas at Apollo's hands.

He rose, therefore, and took the seven-reeded pipe, and buried it, whence none—perhaps—might ever disinter it; then returned, and took his place beside the youth, where he also entered an eternal sleep.

VII

Recollections of November

IN the green country it is often hard to say, unprejudiced, what the season is; and if a revenant noted such things, he would find that many days belied the calendar. Indeed, on first going afield after a long imprisonment by illness, I have detected autumnal savours in a stagnant February day, and mistaken the bravery of October for the nuptial splendour of the spring. Seen afar off, the poplars seem to be on fire with blossoms instead of dying foliage in September. In April the young creeper leaves have a look of autumn in their bronzed luxuriance. I have known many a beaming day with "June in her eyes," as Thomas Carew says—

"June in her eyes, in her heart January."
with a drear wind that kills the budding

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roses. But in my suburban street every season, almost every month, is marked as it were in heavy black letter at its entrance. Nature here uses a brief language, like the hand at Belshazzar's feast, and I know that it is November by the dull, sad trampling of the hoofs and feet; by that testy wind among the chimneys (the mere *body* of the wind; its *soul* it left among the hills); by the light, as of an unsnuffed candle, of the sun, that scarcely at midday surmounts the tallest housetops; by the barren morning twilight, broken by no jolly sound of boys whistling or ballad-singing on their errands. The fire should rightly grow pale toward noon, and I detest its continual brightness, which cannot check a shudder as I read the lines on November by a Welsh poet of four or five centuries back. In his Novembers, pigs became fat and men dreamed of Christmas. The minstrels began to appear, making a second spring. The barns were full—a pleasant thought that made the

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bread taste sweet. The butcher was hard at work. The sea, he says, was joyful, and "marrowy the contents of every pot." The nights were "long to sprightly prisoners," which I take to refer to the delicious evenings the old Welsh spent, exchanging by the fireside proverbs and tales. He ends characteristically : "There are three classes that are not often contented—the sorrowful, the ill-tempered, the miserly." As if hardly these, in his day, could resist the balm and oil of festal tables, good fires, and minstrelsy ! Oh, happy days !

And yet I have joys he never dreamed of, in this mean street. How shall I say with what thoughts I spy a seagull from my window ? — spreading her great wings in flight at altitudes whence perhaps she beholds the sea—an emblem of that liberty I boast, but do not feel. Sometimes an autumn leaf of vermeil or of gold is blown into my room, and such a feeble knocking will throw open many doors of memory. At night, too, there

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is often a moon. I do not think the moon is anywhere half so wonderful as in the town. We see "the other side" of her, as a half-wise rustic once said to me. How like to some pale lady of pity she will arise, softly, as if she feared to wake us, out of yonder dismal chimneys! In summer she seems to pass from house to house, low down, a celestial watchman, blessing the doors and windows. Sometimes, more like Aphrodite than Hecate, she comes up all rosy warm. Sometimes, in November, she sits aloft like a halcyon brooding over the strange and lethal calm of London, her face expressing undecipherable things, like La Joconde. Sometimes, white and frostbit, she flies across the mighty dark blue spaces as if she were hurrying to Actæon's fate, and those hungry clouds were the hounds pursuing.

There has been but one sunset since I came hither, and in the cold succeeding light, so countercharged with darkness, great clouds

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began to troop toward the west, sombre, stealthy, noiseless; hastening and yet steadfast, as if some fate marshalled their jetty columns—hushing all that lay beneath—all moving in one path, yet never jostling, like hooded priests. To what weird banquet, to what mysterious shrine, were they advancing—to what shrine among the firs of an unseen horizon, with the crow and the bat? Or were they retreating, dejected guests, from some palace in the leaden east? In the west, just above the roofs, hung the white evening star. As the cloud approached she seemed to be a maiden—Una, perhaps, encircled by a crew of satyrs. Anon she seemed to be a witch alluring them.

The moon is my closest neighbour, but there is also close at hand a superb labourer, who, if he were of stone, and not of gnarled brown flesh, might stand in a temple of fame as Cincinnatus. At times I drink a cup of tea—or something warmer—with him. Even without a cup, he sits, as it were, “with his

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feet by the fire, his stomach at the board," so genial is he, and would shake Alexander by the hand, with a greeting like the old French bacchanal's, *bon vieux drôle Anacréon*. I feel warmer in my bed as I hear him shouting good-day, in the shrewd early morning, long before dawn. His bad jokes are more laughable than the very best of good ones. Like all good men, he is an assiduous smoker; his pipe is to him a temple of Vesta, and he a goodly stoker; out of his nostrils goeth smoke, and his wife calls him Leviathan. When I remarked that I thought he had no difficulty in stopping smoking, if he liked, "No," he answered, "but the difficulty is in the liking." I would rather live a day such as he lives than have written *The Tempest*.

The only other neighbours with whom I am on calling terms are certain tall poplars, half a mile away. There the calendar is observed less slavishly, and though it be November I go to see a fine yellow sunlight

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slanting among the only half-denuded branches, hardly touched until yesterday's rainy tempest broke up for ever the sibylline summer meanings of their leaves. But they ought to be visited by night. By day they may appear insignificant among the houses that have risen around. They seem exotic, out of place — Heliades, daughters of the Sun indeed, condemned to weep amber tears — horribly slender, unprotected, naked to the world. In the night, however, they seem to have grown by magical increase. They have a solemn look in the evenfall of these sad fading days. The place is too mournful. There is usually one empty house, and the withering foliage whips the panes. I have spent many an evening inside, listening to the wind. But I could not live there ; I should be bound to open the window at that piteous sound, as if to let in a storm-stricken bird, and expect to find the dryad wringing her hands in sorrow. The poplars contrive in summer to look cheerful, yet I think they

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love the autumn best. They are in love with their own decay, like old and widowed ladies that have lived on into these flat unprofitable times.

On another side, and farther still, lies a common, beautiful with gorse, though in the main a mournful place. I sometimes walk there in the morning, between eleven and noon, and meet a number of odd people, in this hour when the prosperous are at their work. They stare at me, and I at them, wondering what the shabby raiment hides. For they—I might say we—are usually ill-dressed, eccentrically-groomed, dreamy, self-conscious people, evidently with secrets. I surmise that they are such as have failed in the world for some vices of honesty, or strangeness, or carelessness of opinion. *Laudatur et alget.* One seems to be a cadet of some grand fallen house, with no insignia left save a gold snuffbox (sans snuff) and a pair of ivory hands. Another is perhaps an author, stately, uncomplaining,

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morose withal, whose nonsense did not suit the times.

“The world is all before him, where to choose
His place of rest,”

but at his garret the duns are in occupation. Another, though singularly jaded, is evidently an old beau, once, no doubt, a Fastidious Brisk, “a good property to perfume the boot of a coach,” using delicate oaths; with soiled necktie scrupulously folded, his trousers turned up (only to display their threadbare edges and a pair of leanest shanks); brought to the dust by the law and some indignant plotter for his hand. One is a man of eighty, who wears a stock—probably a superannuated clerk, one who has seen his master’s failure (it may be), and refuses another place. I see him conning the law news—though he seems too blind to read — always with a knowing smile or frown. They are always solitary. They regard one another with suspicion, seem to fear lest questions be asked, and never exchange greetings. They

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give themselves airs, as hoping to draw toward them the respect they once commanded. And for the most part they are men. One lady I remember, a venerable but grim and unapproachable dame—the relict, perhaps, of a gentleman, an insolvent rake. I have heard her mutter, in a temper out of keeping with her gentility, and shake her slender staff, as if she cried, like Lear :—

“I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion
I would have made them skip : I am old now.”

She is a great reader, in sunny intervals, on a seat overhung, but not shaded, by hawthorn, and I love to see her poring, with tears in her eyes, over a book which I have purposely left there as she approached. In this way she has read George Herbert's *Temple*, *The Worldling's Looking Glass*, and many more. . . . It would be easy to laugh when she and three or four of these poor souls are sheltered under the same tree from the rain—never speaking, and

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looking unconcerned, but all the time nervously anxious to impress, and the beau arranging his tie.

In the evenings I could almost love these brand-new streets, so nimbly do they set the mind working to find anodynes and fantasies "to batter the walls of melancholy." My books seem to be fond of the night—poor ghosts of buried minds—and are never so apt as in the faint candlelight to be taken down and read, or perhaps merely glanced at as I turn the pages, which I think they best enjoy. The portrait of Andrea del Sarto, by his own censorious hand, hangs near, and loves the twilight. If ever, he seems now to smile. 'Tis such a light that in it fancy can without apparent false-ness weave suitable environment for all the ghostly lords and ladies. Proserpina, with the pomegranate, may now have Enna within sight. Beatrice d'Este, with passion long subdued, gazes upon the pageantry of Milan, and cares no more for Sforza and the San-

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severini—does not even hate Lucrezia and Cecilia. . . .

I recall November holidays in a tangled wood, having all the perfume and sequestered sense of virgin forest, that lay in the hollows of some undulating upland, whence, with “morning souls” alert, we used to be able to see the dawn, a rust-red smoke waving along the horizon, and presently turned to saffron; then a sky of pearl, with a faint bloom of the night blue upon it; and one by one the stars went out, so slowly that we fancied they would never disappear if we watched them vigilantly; the consumptive moon went down, having outlived her light, as the first blackbird awakened with a cornet call; the sparrows, like schoolboys, on those cold mornings, chattered and fluttered, but dared not leave the eaves; and all the cold of the windy dawn seemed to be in the starling’s thin piping. Sometimes on the lawny interspaces of the wood we saw fallen leaves and fruit, gold and silver, like shed-

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dings from Hesperidian gardens, in the noon-day sun. And oh for the tang of acorns eaten for wantonness in sunshine from which we never missed the heat! Not until nightfall did we return, and then, "happy, happy livers," laughed as our feet shivered the frost into a myriad prisms.

But to-night, as I take the self-same walk, under the flying rags of a majestic sunset, the gray and silent landscape of few trees and many houses seems a deserted camp (which I startle when I tread among the fallen leaves), or a Canaan from which the happy savage, childhood, has been banished. High up on a blank wall lingers one pure white rose. White with cold, and flickering as if the powerful wind might blow them out, a few stars shine. Far away the leafless branches of an elm grove look like old print against the sky.

And now, by the hearthside, I like best among books the faint perfumes of those old forgotten things that claim a little pity along

Recollections of November

with my love. I had rather the Emblems of Quarles than mightier books where there is too much of the fever and the fret of real passionate life. Odd books of devotion, of church music, the happy or peevish fancies of religious souls, please me well. I plead guilty to liking a thing because 'tis old. I believe, were I alive two hundred years hence, I should like silk hats. As George Herbert says of two words he set great store by:—

“As amber-gris leaves a rich scent
Unto the taster,
So do these words a sweet content,
An oriental fragrancý. . . .
With these all day I do perfume my mind,
My mind e'en thrust into them both ;
That I might find
What cordials make this curious broth,
This broth of smells, that feeds and fats my
mind.”

Were it always evening I could live ever thus, and find in it a pleasing substitute for Arcadia, in which, as the bricks mellowed around me and all things took “a deep autumnal tone,” I should be as much in

Recollections of November

love with the life as Charles Cotton with his, and capable of a vanity like his, and I hope as pardonable. How delicious are those execrable “irregular stanzas” of his, where he seems to expect to go to heaven, because

“ Good Lord ! how sweet are all things here,

How cleanly do we feed and lie.

Lord ! what good temperate hours we keep !

How quietly we sleep !

How innocent from the lewd Fashion

Is all our Business, all our Recreation ! ”

Perhaps, indeed, of such is the kingdom of heaven.

It has been observed that we “devour” a book, and “discuss” a turkey or chine ; in Lilly I find a good fellow who wants to “confer” certain liquor : and with the help of these metaphors I have often dined well, though I have eaten little. I have meditated, indeed, a new cookery book for the library, or “every bookman his own cook,” but the tradesmen’s dissuasions have prevailed. But

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out upon them ! I had hoped by this means to record those messes of old calf and dog's-ears that so reduced our bills at ——. Many a time and oft have I seen a guest's lips glorified as if he tasted ambrosia, after reading Greek—Euripides, perhaps, or something solemn from Callimachus. A Welshman of the company declared that in speaking his own fine tongue he seemed to taste butter-milk and fruit at some mountain farm, a mile nearer heaven than one commonly lives. Corydon used to say he would never read Shelley save at midnight, because he could not bear to eat soon after the taste of those melodious syllables. Give me that man whose *mind* is, in a better sense than Terence intended, always among the pots and pans. And I think, on this humming midnight, I could sleep well, even supperless, after Ben Jonson's lusty lines "Inviting a Friend to Supper" :—

"To-night, grave sir, both my poor house and I
Do equally desire your company ;

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Not that we think us worthy such a guest,
But that your worth will dignify our feast,
With those that come ; whose grace may make that
seem

Something, which else could hope for no esteem.
It is the fair acceptance, sir, creates
The entertainment perfect, not the cates.
Yet shall you have, to rectify your palate,
An olive, capers, or some better salad
Ushering the mutton . . .

“ I'll tell you of more, and lie, so you will come,
Of partridge, pheasant, woodcock, of which some
May yet be there ; and godwit, if we can ;
Knat, rail, and ruff, too. Howsoe'er, my man
Shall read a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,
Livy, or of some better book to us,
Of which we'll speak our minds, amidst our meat.

“ Nor shall our cups make any guilty men ;
But at our parting, we will be, as when
We innocently met. No simple word
That shall be uttered at our mirthful board,
Shall make us sad next morning ; or affright
The liberty that we'll enjoy to-night.”

VIII

Broken Memories

“Mr —— the well-known merchant, is building a fine house, half a mile from the —— Road. Close upon two acres of woodland have been felled, where, by the way, the largest and juiciest blackberries I know used to be found.”—*London Local Newspaper*.

AND in this way many suburbans have seen the paradise of their boyhood effaced. The building rises during some long farewell, and steals away a fraction of the very sky in which once we beheld Orion sink down like a falling sword into the west and its line of battlemented woods. Only here and there a coppice will survive, blockaded by houses a-row. Sometimes a well-beloved pleasure is left almost as it was; the trees are the same; the voices are the same; a silence is there still; but there is a caret somewhere—in ourselves or in the place. In childhood

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we went there as often as our legs could bear us so far; oftener yet in youth; but less and less with time. Then, perhaps, we travel—anyway we live feverishly and variously; and only think of the old places when the fire is tranquil and lights are out, and “each into himself descends,” or when we meet one who was once a friend, or when we lay open a forgotten drawer. A very slender chain only binds us to the gods of forest and field—but binds us nevertheless. Then we take the old walk, it may be, in a walking suit of the best; fearful of mire; carrying a field-glass too; and smoking the pipe that used to seem an insult so intolerable in the great woods. We take the old walk, and it seems shorter than before, a walk not formidable at all, as it was in the years when the end used to find us testy with fatigue and over-powered by tumultuous impressions; when we ourselves thought the sea itself could not be far, and the names of village and hill we visited were unknown.

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A railway bisects the common we cross. Everything is haggard and stale ; the horizon is gone ; and the spirit chafes and suffocates for lack of it. (But the gorse is in flower still.) Then the feet weary on gravel paths downhill. On either side are fields, edged by flaccid suburban grass, with an odour as of tombs—as though nothing fair could blossom in a soil that must be the sepulchre of many divinities. And again the pathway is dogged by houses, interrupting the fields. The former sanity and amenity of air is gone. We can no longer shorten the way to the next houses by a path from the willowy riverside over fields, for the willows are down, the fields heavily burdened with streets. Another length of mean houses, neither urban nor rustic, but both, where I remember the wretched children's discordant admiration of the abounding gold hair of a passer-by ; and soon the bridge over a railway gives a view across plantations of cabbage, etc. But the view is comforting—there is an horizon !

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There is an horizon barred with poplar trees to the south ; the streets are behind, in the north. The horizon is dear to us yet, as the possible home of the unknown and the greatly desired, as the apparent birthplace and tomb of setting and rising suns ; from under it the clouds mount, and under it again they return after crossing the sky. A mystery is about it as when we were children playing upon a broad, treeless common, and actually long continued running in pursuit of the horizon.

After three miles in all we leave the turnpike, to follow a new but grassy road out among the fields, under lines of acacia and poplar and horse-chestnut last. Once more the ploughland shows us the twinkling flight of pewits ; the well, and the quaking water uplifted in a shining band where it touches the stones ; the voices of sparrows while the trees are dripping in the dawn ; and overhead the pompous mobilisation of cloud armadas, so imposing in a country where

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they tilt against ebony boughs. . . . In a thicket some gipsies have encamped, and two of them—superb youths, with favours of raven hair blowing across the dusky roses of their cheeks—have jumped from their labour to hear the postman reading their letters. Several pipe-sucking bird-catchers are at watch over an expanse of nets. We cross a ploughland half within the sovereignty of the forest shadow. Here is the wood!

The big wood we called it. So well we knew it, and for so many years—wandered here with weeping like Imogen's, and with laughter like Yorick's laughter—that when past years bulk into the likeness of a forest, through which the memory takes its pleasure at eventide,

“Or in clear dream or solemn vision,”

it is really this wood that we see, under a halcyon sky.

It covered two acres in the midst of ploughland; but we thought of it as enor-

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mous, because in it we often lost one another; it had such diversity; it made so genuine a solitude. The straight oaks rising branchless for many feet expanded and then united boughs in a firmament of leaves. It seemed far enough from London for feelings of security. But even of that our thoughts have changed; for the houses are fearfully close—a recollection of them lingers in the heart of the wood; and perhaps they will devour it also. . . . Who shall measure the sorrow of him that hath set his heart upon that which the world hath power to destroy, and hath destroyed? Even to-day the circuit of a cemetery is cutting into the field where we gathered buttercups before the dignity of knickerbockers. . . . And here was a solitude. We cannot summon up any thought or reverie which had not in this wood its nativity. 'Tis we have changed! And if we could paint, and wished to make a picture of our youth with its seriousness and its folly, we should

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paint in this wood, instead of in a hostelry, another Don Quixote watching his armour all night after the false accolade.

The dark earth itself was pleasant to handle—earth one might wish to be buried in—and had the healthy and special quality of wild earth: upon it you could rest deliciously. (Compare the artificial soil of a London common with it!) Out of this rose up trees that preserved their wild attitudes. The age-fallen or tempest-uprooted oak tree lay where it dropped, or hung balanced in the boughs of others. Tenderest bramble spray or feeler of honeysuckle bridged those gaps in the underwood that served as paths. And the winds were husbandmen, reapers and sowers thereof. Though, indeed, the trees were ordered with an incongruous juxtaposition of birch and oak and elm, it seemed to us a fragment of the primæval forest left by a possible good fortune at the city verge. But it was more than this. With its lofty roof and the mysterious flashes

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of light in the foliated clerestory, with its shapely boles in cluster and colonnade, and the glimpses of bright white sky that came and went among the leaves, the forest had a real likeness to a temple. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" and passages of Adonais were the *ediscenda* of our devotions.

Here we saw the grim jewellery of winter on fallen leaf and bow of grass ; gold and purple colouring inseparable from the snow upon boughs overhead ; the hills far away sombre and yet white with snow ; and on the last of the icy mornings, the sward beaming with melted frost, and the frost only persisting on the ample shadows with which the trees stamp the grass. Here we saw the coming of Spring, when the liquid orbled leaves of toad-flax crept out of a barren stone. Full of joy we watched here the "sweet and twenty" of perfect Summer, when the matin shadows were once deleted, and the dew-globes evaporated from the harebell among the fern, or twinkled as they

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fell silently underfoot. But the favourite of memory is a certain flower-shadowing tree whose branches had been earthward bent by the swinging of boyish generations. Foliage and shadow muffled the sight, and seated there in profound emerald moss, the utmost you achieved was to find a name for each of the little thicket flowers. If you raised your head you would have seen in a tumultuous spasm of sunshine—say at mid March—the blue smoke upcoiling between the boughs of overhanging trees far off and dissipated in the dashing air; the trees shining in their leaflessness like amber and dark agate; above that the woodland seared in black upon the heated horizon blue;—but you never raised your head. For hours you could here have peace, among the shadows embroidered with flowers of the colour of gold. All which tantalises—sun and clouds and for ever inaccessible horizon—was locked out; only (like a golden bar across a gloomy coat of arms) one sunbeam across the brown

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wood ; thrushes and blackbirds warbled unseen. The soul—this made a cage bird of it. The eagle's apotheosis in the fires of the sun was envied not. What a subtle diversity of needled herbs and grass there is in the plainest field carpet ! all miniature after close cropping of rabbit and sheep ; auriferous dandelion, plumed self-heal, dainty trefoil, plantain, delicate feathered grasses, starry blossomed heather, illuminations of tormentil, unsearchable moss forests, and there jewelled insects, rosy centaury ; nearly all in flower together, and the whole not deep enough to hide a field-mouse.

A dim solitude thus circumscribed liked us hugely. We loved not the insolent and importunate splendours of perfect light. Cobwebs and wholesome dust—we needed some of both in the corners of our minds. They mature the wine of the spirit perhaps. We would always have had, as it were, a topmost and nearly inaccessible file of tomes, which we never read, but often planned to

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read—records peradventure of unvictorious alchymist and astrologer. Thither a sun-beam never penetrated and unmasked. The savour of paraffin and brick-dust should never cling about it. Unfortunate (we thought) is he who has no dusty and never-explored recesses in his mind!

IX

Caryatids

THE oriel surveys an angular plain of roofs—blue slate, auburn tile-work, grizzled stone—and soaring thence a steeple, the clustered masonry at its base inhabited and ever guarded by sad crowned women, with faces lifted skyward. Very likely these are saints, perhaps martyrs; but I never heard their legend from the pigeon that sways about them, or the wind that sharpens the angles of their faces. Night after night I see them, and after many vigils, whilst bells are calling to each other above us, and night closes over the placid city, faces seen in the enchanted past reappear, faces of men and women like Caryatids, and close kin to these guardians of the spire, among cloud and star. Nor

Caryatids

merely faces I have seen, but the long-enduring I have read of also. One by one—as I watch the queenly stone figures, wrought upon by the magic of distance and lofty place (nearer the stars than we!)—such faces emerge from the past, with more of the uncomplaining benedictionless. These are the Caryatids of life. Fearful burdens rest on their tender necks. Yet one sees not wherefore they should undergo so much, any more than should the Caryatids that bear mountains of carven stone. Silent, immobile, like Caryatids, their palms are crossed with tearless supplication on their bosoms. Children, too, are of their number. . . .

Go one humming May afternoon to the fields, along a sweet and wildsome pathway startled by your footfalls—from which you may fancy you hear the wounded note of a spirit of the spot escaping. Out of sight, bees are noisy in the willow top. On almost leafless blackthorns the blossom is delicate

Caryatids

like summer snow. And the foliage of lime and poplar is heavy scented, after rain ; the blackbird's note is mellow for it. . . . Those children crowning themselves with coils of docile bryony, with flowers between, and now running toward a tuneless voice of command in the distance—they are Caryatids. Farther on, I used to meet an idiot, day after day, holding in leash a pair of divine, chestnut horses. He is kind, fraternally kind, to the field creatures ; and they to him, in return. They are indeed his only pleasure, his sole interest. Also he is more truly related to them than you might think. Not one of their voices there is he will not copy—the whew of plovers, the bullfinch's delicate, internal soprano, the sob of unchilded otters—and especially the hiss of snakes. His sense of smell is fine and undeceivable. I never heard a sigh from him ; for he seems to have no longings, no regrets ; the source of tears has run dry, since the time when children baited and derided him pitilessly.

Caryatids

Yet he draws from solitude a kind of satisfaction, like a mere herb, or like a solitary fir on a peak, whose very life is the west wind, by which it was shapen. I think of him—I am not certain wherefore—as a martyr, a saint, notwithstanding that he might rather seem little above the trees he equals in tranquillity. But Wordsworth alone, with his power of assigning to the humblest their unique, proper niche in the scheme of things, could fitly write of him. Who else could so well follow at a few yards an hour the grazing horses? He also, though not exempt from the blithe ministries of the south wind to flower and plant, is among the Caryatids.

Or come on a dead, bleak day in February, when the trees moan as if they covered a tomb—and they do cover a tomb, the tomb of the voices, the “thrones and dominations” of summer past. The rabbits are housed. Dead as soon as born, the first lesser celandine puts forth one flower. Now and

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then a bird crosses the sky with a shriek. So day follows day; and night is so dark that the heavens seem a mirage of earth. On such a day the only light in the prospect is the white bonnet of a grandmother, creeping wearily over the interminable ploughlands alone, picking up stones. She sings a song, and her soul has already gone forward into the silences. At this season, year after year, she is there—she—or another—keeping the generations of undespairing sorrow unbroken. And she, too, is among the Caryatids.

Along with these are the faces of other field women. . . . On the Downs we heard the reapers chanting a song in the motionless corn. All day they reaped, reaped, and never turned to behold the sun, in whose rebounding beams their faces whitened, whilst their napes and shoulders became brown as they stooped. Sometimes they seemed to hail the sun with wistful pity for their babes, and even for the feverish blossoms. To the sun, which had been gracious to them all the year, and

Caryatids

now was cruel, they were praying that he would still be kind ; for then, after he was gone, or at least when they saw him not, in the muffled winter, they would suspend a fruited branch of his own ripening over the chimney-piece, thankfully in memoriam ; or if he would not listen, they seemed to say, in half-laughing indignation, they would evoke a rain-shower that should veil his glory before evening, or trample upon his triumphs at dawn. But evermore the burden was—that the sun would lightly deal with the hills where the reapers reaped, as with the valleys where he raised up a beatific haze. Now charging angrily at the corn rows with sickles, now resting a minute, the reapers presently disappeared in the gulfs they hewed. The women piled the harvest in shining heaps, and after nightfall travelled home, Caryatid-like, with children upon their arms, a faggot upon their heads, and the wreck of sunset was scattered round them with a pomp which in human things we should call grandiose.

Caryatids

There are many more. There is, for instance, the flower-seller, with a step always as soft as if she feared to wake a sleeper—who yesterday, as she passed along the riverside carrying early honeysuckle and fritillaries in a basket on her head, refused to sell her flowers, and for one day at least seemed to prefer hunger to parting with what had brought her to that reedy, tranquil riverside. There are many more ; but the night grows late ; and the thoughts travel beyond the city, to where the wind-carven firs line the hilltop in open order, against the blanched sky. Now deepens the peace of all those trees that veil so much in their hushed mantles of foliage, though if we enter among them, all will have gone. . . . It is a still midnight in white and black. In the sky there are several lonely stars ; one or two, no more ; and even these wither, one at a time, behind invisible cloud, as if refined by a gradual retreat into distance. So grand the silence, the nightingale dares not sing ; only

Caryatids

now and then its voice leaps forth—like a sigh from the breast of the silence ; the vasty night heaves through and through ; the birch tree sprays rise and fall once, and are still.

X

February in England

How pleasant smelt the wood smoke as it rose in a blue column between the pines ! Against the sky its ethereal woof was invisible. For a space the pines, with their wintry noise that never ceases, alternating with grizzled oak trees, lined the roadside. A sudden freshness told us where they ended ; then the trees grew farther apart, and ash, beech and elm made a great silence that was startling, after the companionable murmur of the firs. Their colour was that green which, though never old, is never quite youthful. Every other tree was black for miles, discovering those deep-hued cantles of the sky, betwixt the branchwork, that are the peculiar wonder of leafless woods. On every side rose

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and fell leagues of untenanted lawn, of a cold green, that in the light of a February dawn, so clear, so absolutely clear, looked as the savannahs of Eden must have looked on the first day of the world. There were gardens, ingeniously remarked Sir Thomas Browne, before there were men; and these pastoral solitudes seemed not to have been "made with hands." For aught I knew, no one was abroad in all the world. It was hard to believe otherwise; for there was an extraordinary, virginal purity in the notes of a thrush that sang (as it sang every day) on its particular bough of elm, in the sheen of the first celandines, and in the herbage that waved, encased in dew. Everything was the same as of old—yet not the same. I seemed to be on the eve of a revelation. I could have wept that my senses were not chastened to celestial keenness, to understand the pipits singing as they flew. In a short time the common look of things returned. The rooks began to pass overhead, and some

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alighted, their feathers changing to silver as they turned in the sun. A gate was banged far off. The cock crew, and the sound stirred the sleeping air farther and farther round, like a stone falling into a pool. I felt that it was cold. Beside a distant pool the ash trees had still some magic. Some "potent spirit" was surely hidden among their boughs ; as we approached them, indeed, we expected to discover their secret. But on passing underneath all had fled except a whimpering of the breeze, and instead of something "mystic, wonderful," nothing appeared save a robin singing alone—

"And the long ripple washing in the reeds."

The afternoon of that same day was in another style. A railway journey had effected just such an inconsequent change as comes in dreams. The air was full of that oppressive silence into which changes the unintelligible clamour of towns. Looking scarce farther or higher than the cathedral tower, the sun

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vainly competed with the clock face gleaming beside the Thames. Over the grey water rose and fell continually the grey wings of gulls; others screamed with a melancholy "dying fall" in the grey spaces of heaven, soaring doubtless into silence beyond the mist, in the enjoyment of we knew not what amenities of light and warmth.

"Solemque suum, sua sidera norunt."

Grey roofs, grey ships; indeed, only one immobile ruddy sail of a barge, drifting up, coloured the Quakerish raiment of the day. By dipping my pen into the grey Thames ripple I am fain to make grey the reader's mind as it did mine. But words are frail; even the word "grey," which of all chromatic epithets is most charged with mental and sentimental meaning, has boundaries. The grey changed somewhat; it was night. If the day had seemed a dying thing, the night seemed dead, and not a funeral note came through the mist. So a week passed, and,

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defrauded thus of a sweet tract of life (such as that February dawn had promised), I watched the clockwork movements of the grey-minded men and women pacing the streets. I met hundreds of people in the streets that might have taken rôles in the *Inferno*. And in a more personal and horrible sense than Goethe meant, I felt that here on earth we have veritably to enact hell, as I looked down from a great bridge. A steamer—the ghost of a steamer—passed under. I could hear a voice, perhaps two; I could see a form—the shadow of a form—flit past upon the deck.

“Is that a Death? and are there two?”

But the ship slid softly away under her pyramid of almost motionless smoke. A barge soon afterwards followed: it seemed a league long, and at the stern—ridiculously small—was what must have been the figure of a man straining at an immense oar, and black, thrice black, in that horrid twilight.

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He passed : I was powerless to speak, though I felt he was drifting on to hell—calmly as at the smoothly swirling outmost circle of a whirlpool. Close to the bridge where I stood were many ships aground, with many men at work, climbing masts, walking dreadfully on rippling planks to land, going and coming, coming and going. Only those nearest were thus visible. Those farther off seemed more grisly or more fantastic in their employments. The sun, lying as it were in blood-red pools upon the mud left by the ebb, unnaturally exaggerated men and trades. There was a sense of continuous, inexorable motion. Surely I could see wheels revolving? Almost as surely did I see Ixions bound thereon. I saw yokefellows to Pirithous, Salmoneus, and Tityus. Some of the forms were certainly not human, and the scene, under the doubtful conflict of fierce light with shadow and mist seemed

“a palace bright
Bastioned with pyramids of glowing gold ;

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And all its curtains of Aureorean clouds
Flushed angrily : while sometimes eagle's wings,
Unseen before by gods or wondering men,
Darkened the place ; and neighing steeds were
 heard,
Not heard before by gods or wondering men."

It was almost more horrible still that nothing groaned. The air was left silent with a sense that over all watched some omnipotent assessor who grimly shook the urn. I had no sleepy, honeyed passport for the Cerberus thereof. But I would not for a great price have ventured there, though close behind rang the noise of hoofs, slightly drowned by the hiss of mud. I felt as some lonely spectator of a tragedy in a great theatre,

"*In vacuo tristis sessor plausorque theatro.*"

The sun was burning like newly minted copper.

From London, I remember, we travelled to the county of —, in South Wales. February was making the best of his short life, and leaving March a great deal to undo. "Is

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there no religion for the temperate and frigid zones?" asks Thoreau, at the end of his "Winter Walk." Round the great open Welsh hearths we found a sufficient creed in the sweet paganisms of a fire worship which in that country insists on a blaze in June; preferring it, since for mental and sentimental warmth the sun is some few millions of miles too distant. Spending such an evening by the fireside, it was pleasant to note a culinary genius which experiments evoked. I know nothing that makes the conversation go more "trippingly on the tongue" than the discussion of such dainties as hands modestly declared inexperienced will compose out of scant elements.

"Matter! with six eggs and a strike of rye meal
I had kept the town till Doomsday, perhaps
longer;"

and with less than old Furnace, the cook in Massinger's play, we did succeed in keeping melancholy from the door. Through the

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window we saw a grey beggar feeding a party of sparrows with his crumbs—a fine economy, charity reduced to its lowest terms. Not, however, that it was a hard season. But the willows were in bud, and for that very reason—there were so many tender things to look cold—the sting was more keen. All day were seen rapid clouds tumbling past a white horizon, firmly stamped with the outlines of trees; the willow undulating all together, like a living wave of foliage and limber boughs; the river flowing out of silver into blue shadow, and again into silver where the sky bent as if to touch it; leaf and flower of celandine gleaming under the briers; whilst the air was vibrant though windless—stirred like water in a full vessel when more is still poured in. It was the most perfect of days. The air had all the sparkling purity of winter. It had, too, something of the mettle and gusto of the spring. The scent of young grass, uncontested by any flower or fruit, was sharp

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though faint, and thus the air was touched with a summer perfume. Now and then a blackbird fluted a stave or two. But the silence was mysteriously great, because the incalculably subtle sound of the ocean was ever there, solemnizing, deepening, and as it were charging with "large utterance" the silence it could not break. The whole countryside of grassy level and rolling copse was like a shell put to the ear. For the shore was never still. A little way out the fisher boats might be curtseying on the tranquil tide; but reaching the shore, the same tide came upon fantastic rocks that were an organ out of which it contrived an awful music. Under the beams of the rocking moon, those tall, cadaverous crags rose up like stripped reapers, gigantic and morose, reaping and amassing the dolorous harvest of wrecks, waist-deep in a surge whose waves seemed not to flow and change, but to turn, turn ceaselessly in the contracted corridors among the rocks, like wheels revolving, and bespattered by the

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foam that huddled, yellow, coagulate, quaking, in the crevices.

Soon afterward snow fell, apparently making the air meeter for its freight of scent from the first violets, which certainly smelt sweeter than they had ever done before. The strong bells were choked by snow, and tinkled very timidly in the church. Lightly clothed by the same fall, the pillared tower of white stone looked wonderfully radiant in the moonlight, as if fresh from the footsteps of angels or garnished for a day of extraordinary celebration. Then, too, was the bell note sweetest, though always unequalled in pure aerial quality, because

“We cannot see, but feel that it is there,”

hid as it is in some dim belfry or mossy turret from which one never expects so fine a voice.

As we passed upward to the hills, one day, the snow was fading in the sun, and the laurels rose suddenly up as they shook it off

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in shower after shower. On one hand the ghost of a distant mountain hung lighter than cloud. For a moment another snow shower fell, but settled only on the scattered green of the arable fields : so on that hand lay miles of dark land under a veil of delicatest cirrus. Two miles ahead, on the boldest height of all, was the ruin—the mere dust and ashes—of a castle, pale, continually lost among clouds of which it seemed a part, and as unreal as if it were still in “the region of stories,” and we were reading of it in the monkish chronicle.

The path followed one side of a steep wooded valley, and at the bottom a mountain river ran fast over great stones, its noise muffled by the trees, as if it talked in its beard. For almost a mile we could hear the sounding smoke of a white cataract which gave the river its speed. The great marsh marigolds had come. Fragments of an ancient wall stood here and there among the trees : the stones were blessed with mosses, in whose miniature forests an autumnal red prevailed,

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which, however, loaded with dew, turned to perfect silver in the sun.

Reaching the castle on the hill, I came from those creatures of the seasons and the hours as if straight upon time itself. The noble masonry preserved the curves of several pointed arches; some of the apartments might still have sheltered a stout physique from the pleasantries of wind and rain; but the building had unmistakably been overtaken by eternity. It had for centuries ceased to live. Now death itself was dead within these stones; it was resolved into its elements again. Approaching the castled crag, it was hard to say where crag ended and castle began. Examining the masonry, it was indistinguishable from the rock on which it lay. In summer the wild thyme and the harebell did their best to conceal what was written in terse hieroglyphics on the stones. But winter had undone these sweet deceits. By degrees a feeling of horror grew and became less vague. I accidentally loosened a stone, which

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fell noisily down the almost perpendicular cliff for two hundred feet to the fields below, and by no hard feat of the fancy I felt myself as insignificant as that stone ; I too was cast over the abyss. One of the walls rose almost in line with this sheer cliff, and I could not help picturing the dreadful trade when that side was building. Many a slave must have dropped from the rising wall on to the plain. It is said that Roman mortar was made so durable by addition of human blood. That may be ; here, it is certain, every stone owes its place to human blood. I passed several gaps for the crossbowmen, and looked out : nothing nearer than three hundred feet was visible, and that was below. I followed all the grisly windings of the dripping dungeon, and had scarce the heart to trace back my footsteps into the light. How well these builders expressed themselves ! How perfect is their style, the shadow of their personality ! There is no mistaking the superb brutality of their nature. So forcibly was this still

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expressed that unwillingly I conjured up their subtlest cruelties to my mind. I too, like the prisoner five hundred years ago, was thrust through that deep and narrow window on to the plain below !

I cannot imagine any beings more unlike the builders and owners of this castle than the legendary mediæval knights. What has a Kehydus or a Perceval to do with shrieks which I still could hear amidst this ruin ? Yet tradition connected these walls with Urien.

Then we passed into the little chapel of the castle, still a holy place, where a furze bush flowered, and the ancient turf lay innocent of the footprints even of wind. It was a refuge of eternal peace—peace entailed and handed down through centuries of pleasant and melodious calm, to the chanting of holy men. Our entering footsteps and voices sounded most unreal. We were the ghosts. Antiquity—the echo, the shadow—was the one thing real. In a short time the

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ruins were lit by that weird light "sent from beyond the skies," just after sunset, when far-off things are dim, but near things are strangely near. Those who walked there took deep draughts of eternity,

"Securos latices et longa oblivia potant."

A lark was scaling the clouds as day fell, and sang, though driven madly backward by the wind. In their motion past the sun the monstrous clouds were transmuted into fiery vapours, "such stuff as dreams are made on," light and graceful as Aphrodite rising from the sea. And already a valley here and there was full of night.

Day was almost gone, when again, just as at a certain part of dawn, for a short time spring seemed to be coming down the wind into the land, undeniably the genius of spring, though invisible, inaudible. This promise was nearer a perfume than anything else—as of remote blossom, driven hither across leagues of drenching Atlantic air, making the nostrils

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dilate with half-diffident expectation and surprise. A bat flew round the keep, and his snipping sound could be heard overhead. Hesperus came out, and burned longer than it had done before that year, so that in its tender light the land seemed in that brief half hour to advance a long way toward the season of catkins, through which the first voices from the south—chiff-chaff and wood wren—would presently creep and stir vapours of golden pollen, while in the clear noon there would be no shadow save the fly's on the great buttercup.

XI

A Gentle Craftsman

MY friend had twice hooked me ; the parson had risen to a March brown, and in fact been hooked ; but I failed to land, thus losing the only chance of an overflowing creel. For some hours we had been sowing the wind with flies. The busy nut-brown water of the ripples barely wetted the stones, and could not hold a trout. The pools, that had been glass all day, were changed to silver by the great splendour of twilight ; over them now and then wavered a flash as of swords unsheathed for a moment, where the large trout leapt. (Yet the biggest fish of the season had just been landed below us by a clothes-line and a rod like "the mast of some great amiral.") The rise and fall of the green-heart, the tossing of the silk as it

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evolves a perfectly straight line out of subtlest curves, always exert a kind of sorcery, to which your own silence ministers, amid all the jewel and blossom of summer in the grass and air. At twilight the sorcery is reinforced. The mere excellence of casting achieved by that time of day encourages you to go on. And when you stop—perhaps to change a fly—you are too deep in the enchantment to resist.

It had been a day that made us all more than happy, as if it were the beginning of “the world’s great age.” It was well to be there, as we were—

“If the dream lasts ’twill turn the age to gold.”

The twilight was peculiarly fine. A casual passer-by would have detected the hum of gnats, the liquid whisper of poplars, the far-off sea speaking in muffled under-breath, or the snipping sound of bats. We, ourselves, had noticed them at first, and yet, without ceasing, they had mingled and combined into

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the orchestral silence of summer. Along with the night a mist was coming, and through it the moon and stars were white. We were casting all the time mechanically, dreamily. Overhead we could hear the lost, mournful voices of plovers that wandered invisible. Insects grew horribly bold, and stayed to be crushed by the hand that was meant to drive them off. The bats came closer and closer—some of them followed our flies in the air—one, indeed, hooked itself and fell. For a short time there was something diabolic in the air, in the shapes around us, and in the fancies that came. Was there not an elvish leer traced on the silver bark of the birch we passed just now? I confess that when a thought of the outer world did come, it was heartily to wish ourselves at the Three Dragons. There was a sense of stealthy preparation in the silence. There might be ghosts abroad, or something solemn was happening near at hand. Or were we come suddenly on fairy-land?

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“This is the fairy land—

We talk with goblins, owls, and elvish sprites,”

As if we had passed into a strange land. We really seemed to be suspected by the things around, for the cattle stepped gradually up to our side, sniffed us, and would not be repulsed. I could scent the fume of a pernicious and alluring herb. Now and then, as before, a fish rose. We longed for the splash to linger, so haunting was the silence become.

A home-returning miner came to our release, and we were glad of his company for a mile. He, too, had observed “something funny” in the air just there. “’Tis the ale at the Three Dragons, I’m thinking,” was his conclusion, as he left.

As a fitting anodyne to our experiences, we determined to call on Captain Rowland, a worshipful old man, and master of the gentle craft, who lived near in a great house in a wood, where he cheated *ennui* with some choice books and a cabinet of tea cups,

“With antic shapes in China’s azure dy’d.”

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The house, indeed, we found, but the Captain was gone. We had forgotten that it was five years since our last meeting. The walls of the garden were levelled and overgrown with moss, the famous "little red apples" were still unpicked. Ivy had dislocated the masonry, and towered above the chimney in a gloomy pavilion of umbrage and flower. The house itself was a possession of nettles. Nothing remained save the superb ancestral turf, whose inconspicuous beauty—like the Captain's antique courtesy—had grown up in the family seat, as the result of peaceful centuries that scarcely raised an echo in the world.

In the village I learned that he was dead. It was hard to learn more, for he was generally loved, and his gamekeeper who knew him best, could not speak of him without distress.

He lived a bachelor in the great old house until he died. At home, he was a sharp-tempered, indolent, yet always occupied man,

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with rosy carbuncled face, who swore freely. It was easier for him to forget than to forgive. "Who could love one that never made an enemy?" was a favourite question of his, to which an answer was not expected. I have noticed also that those who suffered oftenest by his temper loved him best. Yet he was not, in the ordinary sense, a generous man; his charity began and ended at home.

For days together he would sit in one room, smoking over theology, night-capped, slippered, wearing a waistcoat whose folds were a diary of years past in vigorous characters. Into this faded room he used to summon his household before the dinner-hour, when he read aloud to them—an odd solemnity—a passage from the *Newgate Calendar* in a stormy bass voice. At the more terrible parts the maids were asked to conceal their faces. "Amen," he bellowed, at the end. "Amen," whispered the trembling assembly. "And now, if you

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like, you can go to church," was his valediction on Sundays.

He was seldom abroad, save to fish, and out of doors he was metamorphosed. He then invariably wore black clothes, a tall silk hat, and a white cravat. His attitude was in accord. He would sit, amid the Hosannahs of jubilant Nature, as summer passed into the land, like an old tree beside the stream, like a figure in a frieze—

"With marble men and maidens overwrought."

Whilst fishing he never spoke a word, nor would he accept society, though the most sociable of men. "Fishing is fishing," he used to say, elliptically. Youthful and feminine anglers he gravely hated; the latter, I think, because they sometimes laughed aloud in their triumphs. According to the Captain, whatever the *casus belli*, war was declared against fish. The rules of warfare must be obeyed. You must play the game as if (or, the Captain said, "because") your

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opponents were intellectual and moral creatures. A fish accidentally hooked he returned to the water ; and yet, I admit, it was his glory to pull the same out again by fair play. It was significantly whispered in the neighbourhood that unless Captain Rowland was out no fish would be caught.

His only fault was his scorn of the *Compleat Angler*. "The old liar," he exclaimed ; "but," he said, softening, "a setter of night-lines is beneath contempt." Secretly, I believe, he loved the book. Only he would not countenance the man who was first a lover of the picturesque, and merely, in the second place, an angler. "There are too many of them," was his opinion ; "besides, they pick my daffodils and ruin the fruit trees when they ask leave to sit in the orchard and hear the nightingale."

I loved the man for certain invaluable delusions, which formed his philosophy, and, being one of the poor objects of his scorn, I am grateful to him for taking me to many a

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delicate place on the whistling moors—
under the woods, in “the morning world’s
fresh gold,” or when the noonday heat de-
frauds the lilies of their dew—and in the
meadows beside the still waters.

XII

Digressions on Fish and Fishing

“PRAY to God,” writes William Lawson, commenting on Dennys’s *Secrets of Angling*, in 1653, that *annus mirabilis* of angling—“pray to God with your heart to bless your lawful exercise,” which perhaps explains the triumphs of clerical anglers. In the early Church, of course, casting the net was a preliminary and probationary stage to high apostolic place and catching of souls. Nowadays it may seem that the order is reversed. I have observed that the finest anglers have served their apprenticeship in the Church. Nor would I appear exclusive and non-juring. For by this means the Church, the Roman Church, and Nonconformity are united in delicate union, safe against those controversies of which the episcopal mace is such a pleasant

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symbol. This I may not omit. I see in it the seed of an everlasting Church. Dean Nowel and old Ken should be its fountains of glory, and large already is their posthumous diocese. Yet the curious will raise objections, I foresee. Discord may rise over the culinary issues of the art. In the directions "How to roste a pike," in Walton's seventh chapter, sleep the principles of a broad and a low, a high and a narrow church. Who, for instance, shall decide on the exact quantity expressed by "a little winter savoury" with which he must be seasoned? And he is to be "often basted with claret wine and anchovies and butter mixed together." How often? The question might fill a Bodleian with handsome tomes and remain unanswered. Nor can my piscatorial and reverend friends formulate the doctrine of the true Church on "Let him be roasted very leisurely." The lay mind will doubtless go on being content with mine hostis's cooking of its pike.

To be an angler is something better than

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to be a "very honest man." But not all his critics have the same lofty expectations of the angler as old John Dennys. Often, indeed, they must needs imitate that great-hearted African kinglet who demanded a tribute of scarlet apparel, yet was well content with two or three bottles of brandy. His virtues, according to Dennys, are twelve, a glorious number, though not without a hint of calamity. The first of these is Faith—

"Not wavering and unstable,
But such as had that holy patriarch old."

It makes a noble sound. Then follow Hope, and Love (*i.e.*, a "liking to the game"), and fourthly Patience; but though I admire the fisherman's patience, I admire the fish's more. After "low Humility" and Strength comes Liberality—

"Like to that ancient hospitality
That sometime dwelt in Albion's fertile land."

But alas! he means only feeding the fish
"with full and plenteous hand," a proceeding

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near allied to a confession of incapacity. Knowledge and "Placability of Mind" ("contented with a reasonable dish") and "Thanks to God" lead on to a virtue that involves nearly all the rest, viz., "Fasting long," for it is in his articles that he must

"Never on his greedy belly think
From rising sun until alow he sink."

Lovers of quietness and good ale, be patient. The last is Memory, so as not "to leave something behind forgetfully." We have sometimes found bad memory a boon. It frees the conscience and stimulates the brain, and is of singular efficacy after a tedious day.

Some objectors to the godliness of angling may be found. Many years ago, I remember to have met a superannuated preacher of some rigid sect in Wales, who had exchanged quite naturally his symbolical crook for rod and line. A fine patriarchal vision he was when going a-fishing. "Go to chapel, you young fool . . . go to chapel; you're no fisherman, though maybe you will become a fisher of

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men," was his pastoral advice to a Sunday sportsman who lost a good pike before his eyes. He himself grew into a famous Sabbath rod in his later days, "still," as he used to say, looking back on his long career, "still the only man that did not rest on the seventh day." His venerable aspect and great renown were long his protection in these offences. But one day, an "elder," a sitter for half a century in the "great seat" below the pulpit, and yet virgin as to Dennys and Walton, quietly hinted that old —— might be better employed. The spring twilight was growing cold, and all the land, with its congresses of mighty trees, looked solemn in the silence that reaches the ear of God. A big trout was tumbling in the deeps. But the old man tucked his rod under his arm and left the bank. Placing his rod and his catch in the vestry, he entered the chapel, and, even truer to his craft than the excellent Dean Nowel, preached in his steaming boots. That sermon, with the text "He taketh up all of

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them with the angle," is famous still. But the old man was right. He should have been allowed to go on and "cast all his sins into the depths." He was too feeble for the excitements of the fierce Welsh oratory. Not very long after he "fell asleep in peace," threading a bait beside the waters.

And another reverend angler I knew in Wales, whom I may not forget. There was a singular finish and cadence about the courses of his life. He himself would call it modestly "a beautiful blank, like a fair sheet of paper unsoiled by art." He was born in a cottage whose wall rose sheer from a bank where a little river died in the surges of a tumultuous estuary. His boyhood and manhood were spent partly in another cottage whose garden slopes to the same river, but chiefly in the river itself, he being a famous truant in those days. When he came to the years that bring ennui and the philosophic mind, he wrote verse; and when, according to the happy Cambrian custom, he used a

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bardic name, he took it from the stream whose sound was ever in his ears, and which—being no “swan,” but just a merry sand-piper—he tamed to suit the dainty melodies of his verses. In one of his best lyrics—I think they are his; anyhow, his frequent repetition made them his own—he put his own wild heart into the cry of the river, as it turned and seemed in places to lose its way, ever with its heart set towards the sea: “The sea! the sea evermore.” He was, he said, no more than Carlyle’s minnow, “Far from the maine-sea deepe.” Yet his soul went out to the sea, to the great matters of the world, ever giving these reality and colour by references to the little river and its copses, that furnished his house of thought with the metaphors by which he lived. He was one of the few genuine fishing philosophers I ever knew. One who will sit through a shower under a tree, discoursing, “And on the world and his Creator think,” is apt to catch no fish. Most of my angling philosophers

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bought their fish of the village barber, who kept them in a bucket.

Some fishermen are great readers out of doors, with a taste which argues (unless the result of gross insensibility) no mean judgment and knowledge of books. To know what will stand the fierce outdoor light that hopelessly demeans the average book is a literary achievement. In this way the sun is a true critic, and the only present test of immortality. Sir Thomas Browne wears well out of doors. So, strange to say, does Elia, probably because he did late justice to Andrew Marvell, though Hazlitt will have it that Lamb was the worst company on a walk. Among modern books, I think the sun likes best *Sunningwell*, with its delicious quiet, and that delicate book of verses *Ionica*. Richard Jefferies does not go quite well with the red sun wine and all the pompous investiture of summer; nor, I humbly think, does Thoreau. One humourist, indeed, I heard of, who swore that he had killed more

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fish with *Walden* than the Limerick bend. But, as a rule, the books that fill baskets are not these ; they are best read away from the sights and sounds which they are magically fitted to recall. Others that are sweet out of doors are old-fashioned poetry, and things which have in them elements of weakness and decay and will "grow old along with you," not competing with their surroundings, but soon wearing into a likeness to them, as I have seen a ship's fantastic figure-head lie moss-covered in an old garden among the pansies. One companion will swear by an odd volume of verses published by Dodsley ; in fact, those eighteenth century verses will sometimes gain wonderfully by the voices of birds and waters which they so lack. One old countryman I knew would always have Culpeper by his side. But perhaps the book is better away. Or let it lie among the tackle and bait, where it will at least do more good than "the marrow of the thigh-bone of a heron."

XIII

Hengest: A Kentish Study

HENGEST is a gardener of Kent, whom I first met when amber was lingering in the maple leaves of a long past autumn. He looks as if he might have conquered worlds ; in fact, he has chosen to conquer the individualities of flowers and to leave no Roman peace amongst them ; and in the last of the decades that are given to us, or perhaps the first which we have to wrest for ourselves, he admits that he has failed. Standing hardly six feet high, he looks a great rather than a big man. He bends—he has been bending all his life—with a gracious stoop that also expresses craft and eagerness to move, as of a runner crouching at the start. His hair and beard are furze-brushes ; the large, quiet eyes are like sweet birds hiding therein. His

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chest is so ample that to see him walking reminds me of the verse: "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs." Yet he has spent all that part of life which he cares to talk about, in growing columbines and wistaria, in providing for sweet-williams and tea roses. His gardening always seems an infinite condescension. I wonder how he can forbear to crush with his craggy hand the little plants that are so often recalcitrant. Alexander the Great listening to music, or Cæsar playing at love, would not give a more perfect picture of repose than Hengest watering the tender Malabar nut or culling garden seeds on a choice August eventide. With his great eyes, too, he is something of a natural poet. Yet I think the magnificent "overhanging firmament," the white immobile or flying clouds, and the glorious paths of sun and moon, impress him very lightly. I could never persuade him to take such delight in the silver and gold of a summer twilight as he obviously

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takes in pruning jessamine late in March, turning his back upon a league of awful woods set amidst delicate fields. Notwithstanding, he will talk of simple garden things and of his own countryside, with a sort of dignified, intimate knowledge, as if verily he were Groom of the Stole to Nature's self. I have sometimes made far-off and, as it were, purposely ill-aimed hints, that flowers were rather small deer for a man of his style. His replies are worthy of a Hengest who is content to be called "Ichabod Larkin, Florist"—with the letters all reversed by the hamlet artist, who has never realised that *d* becomes *b* when printed from a block. I gather that his subtle trafficking in trifles was originally of deliberate choice, and that the Hengest lies buried alive under the coat of Ichabod Larkin, as if it had had a tiny parchment label with a sonorous name tied to it, like the roses in the garden. He looks now a young man, though he has always in a sense been old, as most gardeners are perforce; for by a

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paradox of Nature, youth, that has the whole of life before it, cannot contemplate with equanimity the long years that are as a day's sun to the surface of a lawn or the grain of an oak. The old man, rather than the young man, can plant (and not water with tears) a tree that will never be glorious to his eyes. Hengest has resolved, as he explained in one of his replies, quoting almost his only author, not to be "busy in actions that were done under the sun, rather than those under the shade." I have been sceptical at times as to the complete ingenuousness of Hengest. Perhaps he has been harshly driven to his philosophy? I cannot say; but certainly there are rumours ever on the lips of his friends, and there is an empty scabbard over the mantelpiece at his home, deceitfully draped by texts; there are a few brilliant buttons still to be seen amongst others on his drab coat. If it is so; if in the past he was a soldier of rank, still more is his bearing to be admired; and his humble services take on

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something of the pathos of that famous act of Charles V., who, after his resignation of an empire, called in vain for a servant to conduct an ambassador from his presence, and himself bore the candle out to the gate of the palace. If I throw out any hints on this point, he says that he would rather not be considered as the carcass of a fine gentleman. Then he falls back on his trenches. He speaks of a garden as of a microcosm, laughing to scorn the outsiders who count one flower like another. No two flowers are alike. Out of this knowledge he has gained a kind of charity towards flowers, and (I might say) a reverent humility. He has come to me, wringing his hands, to announce that a certain beautiful dahlia was proud and would not "listen" to him. Even as to weeds, he early taught me the variety of their opposition, from the deep-rooted dock to which deliberate siege must be laid, to the speedwells that wage a guerilla warfare, and the traveller's joy that with its gallant flowers and plummy fruit is the light cavalry of

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the weeds. As some old Puritan or imaginative Welsh Calvinist would dwell upon the world of spirits until in every detail it became alive, splendid and terrible, so, yet not solely in fancy, he has evolved a scheme of the universe of flowers, passionate, intelligent, enjoying and suffering, but hard for the common eye to apprehend, because they are slow with a kind of abstract slowness. The result of his loving study is not in every way profitable. He lets time slip away ; he seems to deal in centuries and could find work which would wear out æons. Years ago, he lost a comfortable post because he had spoiled all the gardenias by a too curious observation of the difference made by planting gladiolas (I think they were gladiolas) in their neighbourhood. But his best things are prodigious. Here again his head is at fault. He can only by extreme threats be lured to give up his finest flowers. Out of his own small cantel of the nursery he will sell nothing, and hardly ever give anything :

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it is therefore the astonishment of the countryside. To several artifices this remarkable perfection is ascribed. It is said, for example, that when he sees a peerless plant in his wanderings, he gathers a seed or two, and puts them in his pocket. There the seeds remain, until moist and well-favoured they sprout forth to the sun. Whatever their origin, these plants are even nearer than his pocket to his heart. When a fire once burnt house and garden, he was overwhelmed, until next spring the flowers came up near the ruins, sown by the flames where they were cruellest. Burnishing his days with patient labour, he has little need for other companions than dwell among green leaves. I do not believe he was ever in love with anything save a rose. Certainly he never hated anything but a weed. Of men he rarely makes a judgment, though he once remarked that gentlemen had one fault: "They won't do what they are told," a vice of which he is often the prey. Seeing

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little society that is not floral, his charity towards his fellows is exceeding great. He says, despite his knowledge of bees, "a man is as good as a bee, may-be," with all the air of one publishing a discovery.

XIV

On the Evenlode

It was the season when days are so long that we must sleep lightlier than swallows, if sunset and sunrise are not to pass unsaluted. That day had been dedicated long ago to indolence. One of my festal, holy days it was, a day italicized on my calendar of saints, whose tranquil names I may not betray. On its eve, I composed my thoughts for the night with that vague sense of expectation with which I always enter upon sleep, wondering what dreams may come, and with what gifts.

When I rose it was light, though not yet day. Alone in my room, high up among the spires, the horned turrets, the acres of dark blue gleaming slate, I took a mouthful of fruit and milk, with hopes that the summer

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morning would bring me somewhere pleasantly to breakfast. Then I set out. Even now the milk must be drumming yonder in the pails! The morning was already hot, so that the chill bath of shadow underneath the lindens here and there was pleasant. At the river I took a dinghy and sculled for nearly two hours, while the fresh perfumes, refined by gale and dew—the blackbird's listless note, with a freshness as if the dew were in it—the wings rising and falling in twinkling thickets—the vinous air of June, all dealt with me as they would. Hardly a thought or memory shaped itself. Nevertheless, I was conscious of that blest lucidity, that physical well-being of the brain, "like the head of a mountain in blue air and sunshine," which is so rarely achieved except in youth. Thus in a prolongation of the mood of sleep, whose powerful touch was on me still, as I knew when I could find no answer for a questioning wayfarer, I covered several miles by one impulse, and as if nothing had inter-

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vened, resumed my breakfast thoughts. For the pebbles of a shallow had been shrieking under the boat, which could go no farther. Sounds and odours suddenly invaded and startled my senses. Solitude asserted itself. The day had come : and beads of night mist were humming as they fell upon the stream from off the willows.

Precisely there I had never been before, though I knew the river well. Drawn, however, by a clamour of poultry and brass pans, I presently found myself at a farmhouse door. The river was out of sight and even of hearing, for in summer it stole through the land like a dream.

After a flutter at the unexpected arrival, the farm folk gave me a bowl of cream and a golden loaf with honey : then left me. Something puritanic in the place—or was it something in the air before the cockcrow of civilization ?—endowed the meal with a holy sweetness as of a sacrament. I seemed to enjoy the merely physical life of the moment

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more purely and loftily than at other times the spiritual even. And there was still an awful purity in the air : on the smooth, stony beech-tree bark lay as if carved, the clear, subtle-shapen shadows of leaf and blossom ; the lawn, level as a pond, was exquisitely damaskeened by daisies and buttercups.

In a sitting room, where I had leave to rest, the aged calm was startled by my entry. The perfectly still cool atmosphere had a flavour of centuries despite the open window. Amid such appropriate circumstances there hung before me the portrait of a young girl, a swan-throated, languid damsel, her raven hair concealing all of her ear save a white crescent, a semicircle of golden beads over her breast, and pervading all an expression more tragic than if Oedipus cried " Mother ! " in the dark catastrophe. Was it our Lady looking for the Cross, in that great darkness over all the earth ? Was it Polyxena, Hecuba's sweet and magnanimous daughter, with the dignity of a statue and the sensitive-

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ness of a flower? Was it the Magdalen beholding angels in the dove's twilight? Was it Joan of Arc, transported by her own magic perhaps, for one hour from fatal Rouen, to see the loving faces under the shadow of Domremy Woods? Was it St Cecilia listening to music? or was it Guinevere in her father's house, lit by the strange light of things not yet above the horizon? Looking carefully I found the name. In a corner I found the initials of that name. It was therefore a piece of autobiography.

The room was oak-furnished in a sombre but fantastic style, apparently the work of a rustic craftsman who had set his fancy free, not unsuccessfully. It looked little used, and, as such rooms in the country often are, given over to the dead (for whom one might fancy those great chairs had so long been left empty), with its photographs all but faded away, its frail old china, its recording Bible, its curious keepsakes from alien shores

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and savannahs. Through its old world savour came a thin breath of perfume from a bowl of reed colonnettes and foamy meadow-sweet. Now and then I espied, in a mirror, the mowers dreamily swaying like summer waves, or resting a moment on their scythes. I could sometimes catch faint sounds: yet they seemed but echoes. Thus the world outside was realised only as in a book. So I had opened a chance volume, and was reading :—

“Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy far-off things,
And battles long ago :
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day ?
Some natural sorrow, loss or pain,
That has been, and may be again !”

when a young girl came in, neither Polyxena, nor Magdalen, nor Guinevere, though it was her portrait that hung upon the wall. If her hair had not whispered in the air, I should have called her spirit or fay : so light she was, moving softly as if she flew. Though a

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noticeable face, hers was not easily to be remembered. It seemed a type rather than an individual face, the sum of many diverse souls. The ivory features were grave, yet ready to smile, with a meaning, old-fashioned sweetness, as of a century of different thoughts and passions from ours. Her large grey eyes were thinking continually. Often a long time passes ere we look into the eyes even of a lover. We could not say whether they were blue, or grey, or brown. But her eyes cried out to me instantly. Over them, almost oppressing them, the space up to the brows was full and wide, the eyebrows themselves fine, long, and curved like a hawk's outspread wings. The mouth was perhaps a little wide, because the corners, curling upwards, were unusually long: the lips delicately cut, their crimson wonderfully contrasting with her cheeks, as I have seen a creeper leaf lie in November on a film of earliest snow. The hands were small, but the fingers seemed long, being taper, arched and languid. Her

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whole expression was one of holy wistfulness, but changed ceaselessly and even contradicted itself, like a picture seen again in other days : it was full of the sorrow there is in laughter, the joy in tears. To think of her in the vulgar contacts of life was impossible. Even her simple "Good morning" could not dispel the dreams by which I was besieged : it sounded so odd, that I could not respond. So she sat down and played simple tunes on an organ. It was mere practice, earnest, sensitive, but unskilful : yet the sound mastered and swayed me inexorably. One stop there was that when touched laid open the gates of Paradise and let free its harmonies.

I laid aside my book and watched. She was too intent to observe. She was seated on a tall, straight-backed chair, and made a quaint figure, her face more serious than before, her abundant hair falling in a cascade over her shoulders, and occasionally creeping rebelliously over the silver half moon of her

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forehead which it framed, until she had to pause in order to persuade it back. Somehow within me was touched a chord that I knew I had heard—I knew not how long ago. As often at sunset the mind stirs afresh with impulses long thought ensepulchred, so it was now. Nor was the spell broken when she rose, and after shifting a few chairs, began to dance, with the same earnestness, a severe gaiety.

My brain was full of gracious phrases of salute as she left; my tongue refused; and all I said concerned the weather; to which she laughed divinely in reply.

Perhaps I should never see her again, but she haunted the memory of that resplendent day, immortalising the fragrance of the blue cottage smoke mounting in still air, the shadows lying in pools (as it were) upon the lawns, and the gauzy moon far away eastward. Laid up in the musk and lavender of my memory, she had become according to my mood Polyxena, Magdalen,

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Joan of Arc, but above all a St Cecilia, "near gilded organ pipes."

Before noon I left, with a plan of soon returning. But the next day passed, and several more. When at last I went, my flowers from that sweet place had withered. A friend accompanied me. I need say no more. The river is branched and serpentine just there, and we searched in vain. Even I sometimes think there never was such a farmhouse and St Cecilia, though in my dreams it is otherwise.

XV

Isoud with the White Hands

THAT road could lead nobody to Rome. The only village that it passed was a mere gap in the long hedge, holding a parson, two or three fools, and a sense of ancient peace. Then it entered gently into the secret places of the land. On either side the fields and woods lay open; surprised but not alarmed by so tranquil an intrusion, they were beheld in all their divinity. The hedges of the road were so low, that only at a hill-top was the waving honeysuckle seen against the silver sky of noon or the azure of night. Overhead the oaks joined hands; through their close leaves the fractions of shining sky came and went like stars while I moved; and when the foliage of one tree met without touching the next, a blade of sky, like a

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sword gently unsheathed, was described by the long lines of scalloped leaves. The trees were silent, saving when they found a voice in one of the birds whose faint songs are part of the melodious quiet of summer.

Not too often, cottages grew (they seemed to grow) beside the road, and their gossipy hollyhocks curtsied in looking over the hedge. Against the white wall, brave peonies looked cool. Rose bushes stood at the borders of the path in command of wild-flower beds, that nevertheless slipped through with a strand of delicate belled toadflux, or one blossom of pimpernel like a volcanic flame between the pebbles. Sometimes the precious-looking Morello cherries lay ardent as flame and cool as dew in the heat of a southern wall. In another place the latent splendour of fifty summers had escaped and spent itself in hiding the cottage with roses. A yew tree more rarely stood at one side, and within its influence, though not within its shadow, was a nunnery of white flowers. The cottages—

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of grotesque mixtures of black oak and whitened stone, or of golden brick—and the sombre inhabitants were in contrast with the exuberant many-coloured, many-thoughted flowers, which yet, at times, arrayed these men and women with a divine garment. Here and there, larger houses shone through a skilful veil of holm-oaks and bays. They never seemed to be aboriginal like the cottages, but to be visitors, lightly planted in the soil. For some distance around these, the wild trees had withdrawn, standing, at the edges of a road, with that continuous motion and murmur of their branches that gives these sentinels a timorous expression, as if they had crept out into the light and, becoming afraid, tried vainly to retire.

Every two or three miles a by-road set out on either side, underneath elms and abeles, and after carrying the eye delightfully for a space, deceived it at last among the shadows of many trees.

One by-road went to a lifeless mill, a tall

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house with upper windows of ample prospect. Above the wheel the waters no longer slid fast with awful repose, but cried and leapt through the broken flood-gates into a pool in the shadow of steep banks and underwood. The house was peopled only by the beautiful machinery of polished wood, now still and morose. The wheel too was still. Callosities of dry moss on the spokes, little by little, took the place of the weed which the river had combed into such excellence. And I could not but wonder that these things had, according to Hecuba's wish, voices "in hands and feet and hair," the eloquence of death. The place would have been sad, had it not been for the meadow cranesbill at the door, a mournful flower, but here, as part of the ceremonial of decay by which this desolation was made perfect, it left one thought, "How beautiful is death." Each evening, just when the first nightjar was skimming the wood, the sedge-warblers began to sing all together round the pool. The song might

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have been the abstract voice of some old pain, feebly persistent. It went far into the night with a power of ghostly alarms, and attuned to such thoughts as come when night in certain places is malign, reverses the sweet work of the day, and gives the likeness of a dragon to the pleasant corner of a wood. The birds were full of prelusive dark sayings about the approaching night.

The footpath by the mill was fading away, for it now led to nowhere—whither few cared to follow it. Possibly the last step may soon linger among the encroaching flowers, the rank growths of willowherb, tansy, and betony which, poor enough by themselves, make the thicket sumptuous by their profusion. And who took the first step? Someone in the days when, wherever you went you came to nowhere. For there are few footpaths that are new, and those that are old may be drowned or cut to pieces, or may be incorporated (as De Quincey has said) in someone's kitchen, but seem never to die, and the

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more they are down-trodden the more they flourish. Curiosity as to whether Shakespeare ever started one is idle. They are footprints, perhaps, of the immortals. They are vestiges of that older day when this land also "was in Arcady." Even to-day they may be seen, after rising and falling in the fields, to be gathered into that far country again, where hills like clouds and clouds like hills are mingled beneath the white sun of noon.

One of these paths entered a lane which suddenly ceased, and round the corner was the kingdom of heaven at my feet—the Kentish weald, just grass and corn and trees, and like jewels on that delicate cloth, a white hamlet or an auburn farmhouse with oast-houses around. These conical buildings give parts of Kent a unique geniality. They are of many hues—dull red, yellow, and the colour of pomegranate rind; they may be seen of the tint of good toast. Something of the ruddiness of earth, as it is found in ripe wheat, in October leaves, and in the

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lotus flower, has penetrated the brick, and expresses the lust of the earth for a gaudier flora. The oast-house is indeed among the Lares on the vast hearth of the sun, and on gloomiest days it has its divinity. In a fine haze that genial, and, as it were, indoor humour of Kent is complete. The haze which comes with sudden heat after rain in April, and that with which September, or even June, chooses to veil her splendour, both are elements in the characteristic scenes. They have also a special goodness for the mind, for those above all

“That soar but never roam.”

By seeming to confine the outlook on which their silken fringes have fallen, they enlarge the sight, which an infinite view is apt to distract and dissipate. Shutting out the few miles immediately about us, they let in the worlds and starry spaces to the inward eye. When they cannot do this, they build up an incomparable prison ; and as the inmate

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moves, the moving walls invite him to a happy expectation of more than liberty. In all seasons the presence of the oast-house amid the haze is like that of a wood fire such as burns continually in many farmhouses ; so that even in March the hollows are like great kitchens, with a gentle sense of home. In autumn I have seen gipsies and other vagrants going to sleep under the moon. There was an oast-house at the end of their lane, two more on the slopes above. Their fire was out and their clothes were thin. Yet there seemed nothing extraordinary in the act. I wondered why I was going farther to sleep. The maternity of the earth is never so attractive as at that time and in Kent. Fruit abounds ; there are rabbits for the carnivorous. A sparkling liquor may be lifted from the spring. The heather or grass is an airy, dry and comfortable palliasse, and out of doors you are never late for breakfast. So well was I entertained, that I almost breathed a grace when I tasted the air or

Isoud with the White Hands

saw the tench rolling at nightfall among the lilies.

Near the mill another path branched into a park. The sea of turf was occupied by great oaks and the shadows of oaks. In one part the gardener had planted cypress, justly confident in the effect of these pillars of darkness seen against a hot blue sky, auburn roofs and the pale grass. The shadows of the trees fell upon me as I entered the park, and filled me with solemn thought. I cannot walk under trees without a vague powerful feeling of reverence. Calmly persuasive, they ask me to bow my head to the unknown god. In the evening, especially, when the main vocation of sight is to suggest what eyes cannot see, the spacious and fragrant shadow of oak or pine is a temple which seems to contain the very power for whose worship it is spread.

For a time the sky was grey with thoughts of rain. The small birds twittered nervously in the wood below; the ring doves came

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home gleaming in the humid horizontal beams. But presently all that was left of the grey was a tenderness in the golden light. From among the trees I could see a pool at the foot of a sloping lawn, and a swan moving to and fro so nobly, that I should have thought she was borne by the water, if that had not been as still as ice. The colours of the sunset were doubled in the pool—with something added, as things are seen in dreams. The turf had a perfume peculiarly nourishing to the fancy, and which, giving contentment, is on the side of the old doctors who commended the alimentary “virtues” of scents.

As quietly as the night was coming, and as benignly, something floated under the trees, turning an unknown face towards me; then passed away as softly as the day was fading. I just saw the pale glorious face. A bevy of dainty spaniels followed her soberly, as if to make up for the state which did not encircle her out of doors.

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She herself was, like a cherub by Reynolds, only a perfect face flying in the air; and about her was a sense of inaudible harps. . . . Could she be the face that had been as a benediction, when I stared and was baffled and stared again into the meaningless London crowd? For a day or two such a remembered face has sometimes been a guardian genius of my ways; the delirium of seeing the thousand faces again when I had fallen asleep was comforted by the one, though utterly unknown, and never in reality to reappear. Was she one of those holy ones met again by divine good chance? She, too, has revisited my closed eyes. Or perhaps she was the "angel" of a heroine from my childish books, one of those of whom I fancied that I should seek their faces in the shadows, and should not be happy, or contented with my sorrow, until I saw them once more. At times she has come to me as that sweet saint, Dwywnwen of Wales. Unfortunate in her innocent

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passion, Dwywnwen was restored to tranquillity in sleep. The friendly Deity also promised her the fulfilment of any three wishes. She chose therefore that the sentence against her hostile lover should be revoked ; that all true lovers should triumph or be healed ; and that she (it was her only ungenerous choice) should never wish to be married. She afterwards took the veil and became a saint, and if the true lover called upon her, he was cured or satisfied. She became traditionally an Aphrodite, beautiful and unpoluted. And a saint, gently befriending pure affection, my apparition certainly must have been. But although visionary smiles have answered me when I called upon her spirit as Dwywnwen, she came in the end to embody perfectly my fancies of Isoud with the White Hands. In the "Morte D'arthur" she and her gallant, mournful brother, the knight Kehydus, are but as ghosts of desperate longing amid all those knights and queens, so brilliant even in their tragedies. Kehydus loved La

Isoud with the White Hands

Beale Isoud; but, if unsuccessful, he was happy in comparison with his white sister. "He," says Malory, "died for love." She lived on, as if death scorned such easy victory. In the "Morte D'arthur," she fades out of sight, and, like a revenant in her faint life, we may think of her as continuing so, and here crossing my path among these fields, in the likeness of a girl, merely pure and beautiful, and a little sad, like Isoud with the White Hands.

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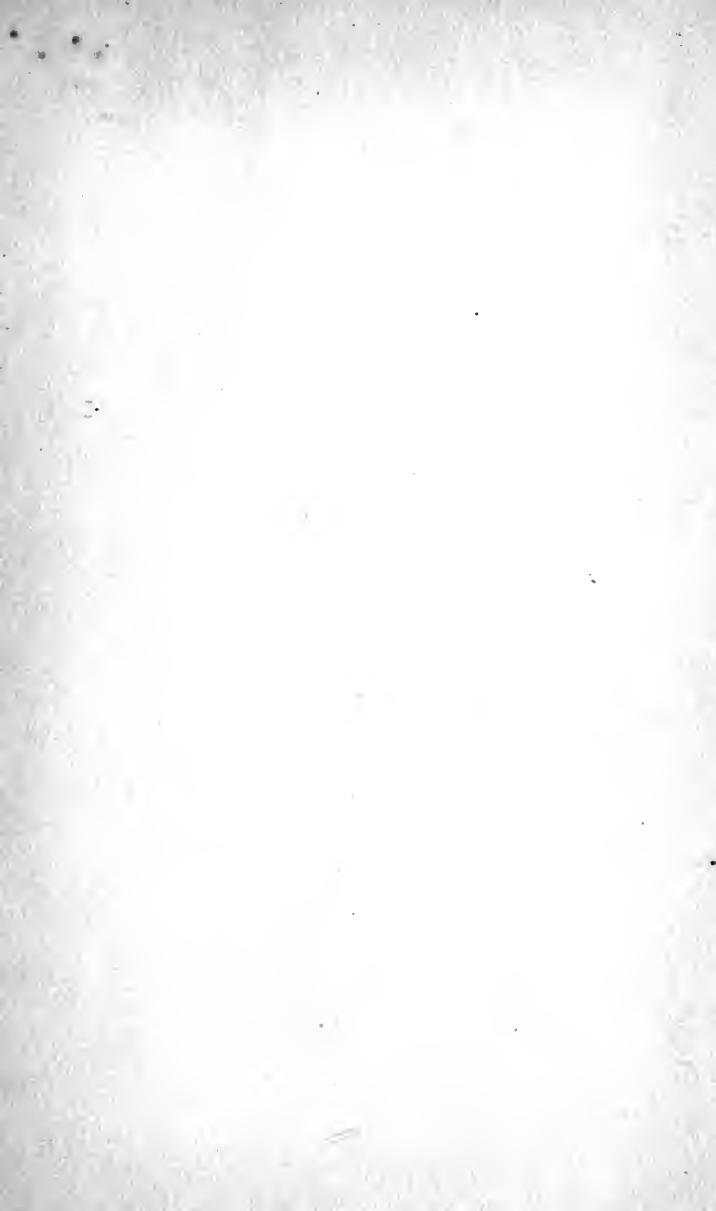
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